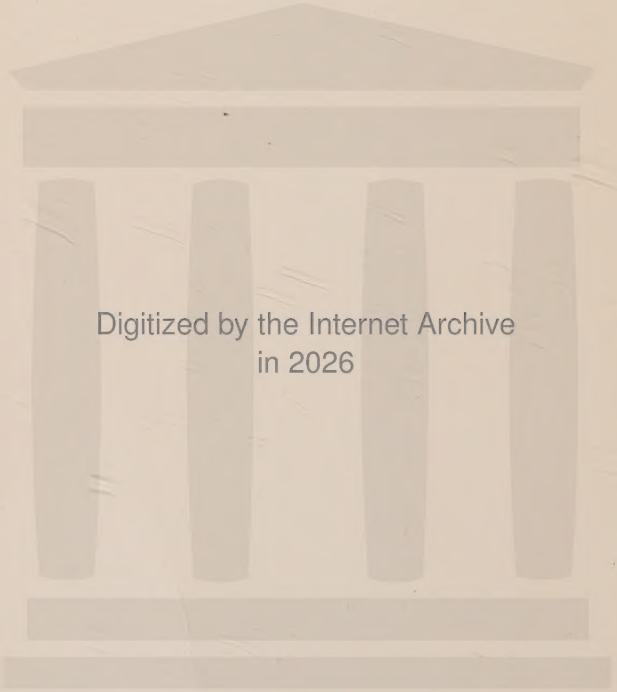
CONCERNING THE CHRIST

J. D. FREEMAN



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/concerningchrist0000jdfr

CONCERNING THE CHRIST

CONCERNING THE CHRIST

BY

J. D. FREEMAN, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "LIFE ON THE UPLANDS"

NEW YORK

A. C. ARMSTRONG AND SON

3 & 5 WEST EIGHTEENTH ST

1908

232
F87

TO

THE MANY FRIENDS

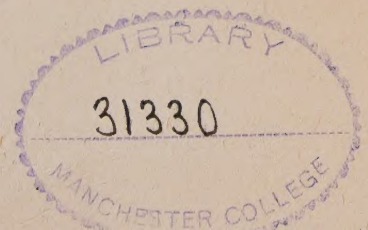
ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

WHO SO GENEROUSLY EXPRESSED APPRECIATION OF

MY EARLIER BOOK, "LIFE ON THE UPLANDS,"

I GRATEFULLY DEDICATE

THIS VOLUME



CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

CHRIST IN THE MANGER . . . 1

"And this is the sign unto you; ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger."—LUKE ii. 12.

CHAPTER II

CHRIST'S FIRST RECORDED WORDS . . 15

"How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"—LUKE ii. 49.

CHAPTER III

CHRIST AT THE JORDAN . . . 33

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

PAGE

But Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him: and, lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."—MATTHEW iii. 13–17.

CHAPTER IV

CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS . . . 47

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."—MATTHEW iv. 1.

CHAPTER V

CHRIST AT THE WEDDING FEAST IN CANA . 63

"This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory."—JOHN ii. 11.

CHAPTER VI

CHRIST IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF NAZARETH . 77

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read."—LUKE iv. 16.

CHAPTER VII

PAGE
CHRIST CLEANSING THE TEMPLE . . 95

"And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and he made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the changers' money, and overthrew their tables; and to them that sold doves he said, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise. His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house shall eat me up. The Jews therefore answered and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews therefore said, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he spake this; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said."—JOHN ii. 13–22.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRIST AT JACOB'S WELL . . . 109

"So he cometh to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph: and Jacob's well was

PAGE

there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water."—JOHN iv. 5–7.

CHAPTER IX

CHRIST ON THE MOUNT OF BEATITUDES . 123

"Every one therefore which heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man which built his house upon the rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock. And every one that heareth these words of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof."—MATTHEW vii. 24–27.

CHAPTER X

CHRIST BY THE SEA OF GALILEE . . 139

"On that day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside. And there were gathered unto Him great multitudes, so that he entered into a boat and sat; and all the multitude stood on the beach. And he spake to them many things in parables, saying,

PAGE

Behold the sower went forth to sow."— MATTHEW xiii. 1–3.

CHAPTER XI

CHRIST BY THE SEA OF GALILEE (*continued*) . 155

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field: the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls: who, when he hath found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."— MATTHEW xiii. 44–46.

CHAPTER XII

CHRIST CONCERNING THINGS LOST . . 173

"And he spake unto them this parable saying,
What man of you having an hundred sheep . . .
Or what woman having ten pieces of silver . . .
A certain man had two sons. . . ."

LUKE xv. 3, 4, 8, 11.

CHAPTER XIII

CHRIST AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES . 191

"Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."— JOHN vii. 37.

CHAPTER XIV

PAGE
CHRIST IN THE HOME AT BETHANY . . 207

"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."—JOHN xi. 5.

CHAPTER XV

CHRIST ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION . 227

"And he was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light."—MATTHEW xvii. 2.

CHRIST IN THE MANGER

"And this is the sign unto you; ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger."
—Luke ii. 12.

CHAPTER I

CHRIST IN THE MANGER

1.

The Babe in the Manger is the Sign of the Spiritual Primacy of Childhood.

THE Old Testament opens with the picture of a child-man in a garden; the New Testament opens with the picture of a man-child in a manger. Around the figure of the child-man Genesis weaves the story of Paradise Lost; about the person of the man-child the Gospels weave the story of Paradise Regained. The portrait of the child-man is dim and indistinct, like some faded old daguerreotype in which the features seem to be obscured by a clinging haze; the portrait of the man-child is as fresh and clear as if but yesterday put upon the plate. It is done in fast colours. Neither mist nor dust are permitted to rest upon this precious triumph of an artless

art. Every morning the keepers of this treasure breathe upon it with their warm desires and burnish it with the velvet touch of love. Throughout the day they wear it upon their hearts, and at night they find their cleansing and their balm in contemplation of its sweet and heavenly grace.

There is a sense in which Christ remains for ever the Holy Child. His spirit never lost the freshness of life's morning hour. To the close of His day on earth He was a fragrant, dewy rose. He never lost the sense of the recency of His exodus from the bosom of the Father. He never lost His childlike trust in God. He did not outgrow—

> "The hour
> Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower."

Not one golden line ever faded out of His early ideals. No cynicism soured Him, no pessimism chilled Him. He carried the child-spirit with Him to His cross. He carried it with Him to the throne of glory. It is by the child-spirit He rules in the heavenly world. In the midst of the throne stands a Lamb. The last words recorded from the lips of the crowned Redeemer contain the affirmation of His

perpetual youth: "I, Jesus, am the bright and morning star."

And the child-Christ is pre-eminently the child's Christ. Nowhere is He more clearly reflected than in the unspoiled eyes of the hearts of little children. The child-spirit is the seer-spirit. In life's cloudless morning some peaks stand out in clearness upon the horizon of the soul which all too often fade from view as day advances. When the child-spirit dies a light goes out of the soul which can only be re-kindled by a rebirth. God became a little child that He might come to men, and men must become as little children if they would go to God. The inner secret of the Christian life is the carrying of the picture of Christ in the heart. And the children are its best custodians. The guarantee of the permanent enthralment of the human heart to Christ is the perpetual renewal of the child-life of the world. There are times when our babies teach us more of God than our Bibles do. It is an open question whether the pulpit or the cradle is the greater religious force. The cradle speaks upon a narrower range of themes than the pulpit does, but its testimony is more consistent, more constant, and more convincing. To reverent parents the birth of children into

their homes is a sacramental experience, bringing them into immediate relations with the unseen. It is said that when Origen was an infant in his cradle his father would sometimes stoop to impress a kiss upon his breast and to say, "This is a temple of the Holy Ghost." There may be something more than poetic fancy or a reminiscence of Platonic philosophy even in Mrs. Browning's quaint thought of—

> "The murmur of that outer Infinite
> Which unweaned babies smile at in their sleep
> When wondered at for smiling."

Then, too, the love begotten by the birth of children is one of the most powerful instruments of soul culture. Parental love is the most unselfish, the most sacrificial, the most spiritual of all human affections. Out of that, as we know it in ourselves and in those who have fathered and mothered us, we best know God. A world without a child would be a world with its windows closed and curtained against the light of heaven. The graves of the children, too, as well as their cradles, link us with the spirit-world.

> "There's a narrow ridge in the graveyard
> Would scarce stay a child in its race;
> But to me and my thought it is wider
> Than the star-sown vagues of space."

Most men are religious when they look upon the faces of their own dead babes. The materialism which at other times clings so closely to their minds and infects them with doubts of God and immortality drops away from them in this hushed hour. If we never buried any but the aged, the pilgrims exhausted by the long and weary road, we should be haunted by a darker fear that death may be the end of all. But that these fresh young spirits should be quenched for ever seems impossible of belief.

As men and women we are only at our best when nearest to the simplicity of our childhood. It was only yesterday that Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was carried to his burial amidst extraordinary demonstrations of a nation's love. No former premier of Great Britain had won the affection of all political parties and all classes of citizens to so great an extent. Nor had any former leader of the British House of Commons ruled it with such consummate ease. Yet he was not a brilliant man. He was not an orator nor a master of statecraft. While great men bowed to him as "the Father of the House," in their hearts they felt towards him somewhat as one feels towards a winsome child. It was

the boy in him that they loved so well. It was the "little child" that led them. They saw in him a simplicity which success could not spoil, and a sympathy which neither political reverses nor popular prejudices nor domestic griefs could chill.

We should make it a purpose of our life to carry the child-spirit with us in its freshness through the years. It is only thus that we can keep in touch with heaven. We are all as little children when we pray, if we really pray. And prayer is the transcendent act of the soul through which we come to our utmost spiritual stature. We shall never do anything greater than to keep the child in us alive to the end. If we could choose the mood of our own death-hour it would be to fall asleep in Jesus as a child sinks into slumber in its mother's arms. It is said that Daniel Webster, in his last moments of consciousness, folded his hands upon his breast and prayed :—

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.
And this I ask for Jesus' sake,
Amen."

When the great Guthrie lay dying, he

asked the watchers about his bed to "sing a bairn's hymn." Always the child in us is our chief dependence for contact with the Infinite.

2.

The Babe in the Manger is the Unmistakable Sign of God's Sympathy with Men.

All our knowledge of God is obtained through signs, of one sort or another. The nature-world is a many-paged sign-book, written through with symbols of intelligence and power. But it cannot tell us what we most need to know concerning God's attitude to our individual lives. This knowledge we can only attain through the revelation of God in Christ.

It may with accuracy be said that all the story of Christ's life on earth is a record of the eloquent signs He gave to men in God's behalf. Wherever we find Him in the Gospel narratives, whether in home or synagogue or temple, in wilderness or city, on mountain or on lake; whatever form of activity we find Him engaged in, whether teaching or healing, stilling storms or subduing spirits, forgiving sins or raising the dead or suffering on the cross; this one thing He is ever doing—flashing signal-lights from God to men. He made signs

to men, and they were the most impressive and appealing that the world has ever seen; but he was able to make these signs because He was in Himself the Sign of Signs.

If we accept the New Testament account of the origin of Bethlehem's Babe we can no longer doubt God's perfect sympathy with men. Christ in the manger means that deity has cradled itself in the midst of human poverty and sorrow and suffering and sin. When this child weeps we behold our God in tears. When He dies upon His cross we behold the blood drip from the heart of the Eternal. The Babe in the manger is the sign of God's desire to come near to us, to share our sorrows, to bear our sins, to deliver us from every evil thing, and to save us unto His eternal kingdom.

3.

The Babe in the Manger is the Conclusive Sign of Man's Capacity for Receiving God.

The creation story tells us of a man made in the image of God. The incarnation story tells us of a God made in the image of man. The child-man in the garden and the man-child in the manger are both impressive

signs of the kinship between God and man; but the latter is by far the clearer and more conclusive. In this child came to dwell the fullness of the Godhead bodily. The perfectness of the character of the Son of Man is the proof that the moral attributes of God may come to be the personal possession of men. This capacity for the indwelling of God raises humanity to a new dignity. That the Son of God should become the Son of Man is the highest compliment that deity could pay humanity. It has been conjectured that the fall of Lucifer was due to the anger of his wounded pride on learning of the purpose of the Son to pass by the nature of angels and take upon Himself the nature of men.

4.

The Babe in the Manger is a Sign to Warn us against the Danger of Neglecting to Offer the Hospitalities of our Hearts to Christ.

The fact that in the hour of His birth "The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head" in a stall, will always serve as a reminder of man's blindness to high privilege. That inn at Bethlehem came near to having greatness thrust upon it. It

was within a hair's-breadth of being immortalized by the patronage of the King of Kings. But it knew not the day of its visitation. The tide of travel surging through the land in consequence of the Emperor's edict that all the world should be taxed and that each man should go to his birthplace for registration, had brought an unwonted crowd to the little inn. Before Joseph and Mary could secure accommodation the place was full. The first to come was the first to be served, so that there was "no room" for the Holy Family in the hour of their emergency.

It is a characteristic feature of our modern life that the available space within us is speedily taken and densely packed. If a man has any capacity for thinking in these days the chambers of his mind will be quickly filled with intellectual interests. Science is busy sending in new facts and theories and demanding that they be accommodated. It wires ahead for rooms, offering big prices. It threatens with pains and penalties should it be denied. Along with Science come Art and Literature and Philosophy and Politics, each clamouring for room and entertainment. Business, too, shoulders its way into the soul. It rides

up to the gates booted and spurred and splashed with mud. Sometimes there is blood on the feet of the horses which it rides. It comes with force and impatience. Its riding-whip beats a loud challenge upon the door. Pushing in, also, to book for rooms, are the varied Pleasures which our modern civilisation affords. Loudly they knock for entrance. They promise song and story and games and laughter and forgetfulness. The danger is that amidst all these claimants for our hospitality Christ may be crowded out. There are some quaint, sweet lines in an old Moravian hymn-book which may serve to work in us a greater carefulness in this regard.

"But art Thou come, dear Saviour? Hath Thy love
Thus made Thee stoop, and leave Thy throne above
The lofty heavens, and thus Thyself to dress
In dust, to visit mortals? Could no less
A condescension serve? And after all
The mean reception of a cratch and stall?
Dear Lord, I'll fetch Thee thence! I have a room
('Tis poor, but 'tis my best), if Thou wilt come
Within so small a cell, where I would fain
Mine and the world's Redeemer entertain;
I mean, my heart; 'tis sluttish, I confess,
And will not mend Thy lodging, Lord, unless
Thou send before Thy harbinger; I mean
Thy pure and purging Grace, to make it clean
And sweep its nasty corner; then I'll try
To wash it also with a weeping eye.

And when 'tis swept and wash'd, I then will go
And with Thy leave, I'll fetch some flowers that grow
In Thine own garden, Faith and Love to Thee;
With these I'll dress it up, and these shall be
My rosemary and bays. But when my best
Is done, the room's not fit for such a Guest.
But here's the cure; Thy presence, Lord, alone
Will make a stall a Court, a cratch a Throne."

I have read that if one were to suspend a bell weighing a hundred tons, and a little child were to stand beneath it and play upon a flute, the vibrations of the air produced by the playing of the flute would cause the bell to tremble like a living thing and resound through all its mass. As bell responds to flute so the heart of the Christian responds to the music of the message that issues from the manger-cradle of the Babe of Bethlehem. The time will come when the music from that manger shall melt into itself all earth's Babel sounds and fill the world with harmony. When the heart of humanity has been everywhere touched and tuned into accord with the ground-note of Bethlehem, it will become a golden bell whose rhythmic strokes in the tower of Time shall—

"Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times."

CHRIST'S FIRST RECORDED WORDS

"How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"—Luke ii. 49.

CHAPTER II

CHRIST'S FIRST RECORDED WORDS

THESE were the first drops to fall into the flask of history from the fountain of Christ's speech. We taste in them all the distinctive flavours of that Water of Life which afterwards flowed so freely from that exhaustless spring. The qualities of spontaniety, originality and authority, which characterise the later utterances of the Great Teacher are all present in this first crystal jet of speech which fell from His fresh, young lips. Yet with all these qualities in them, the words do not impress us as being precocious words. There is nothing weird about them. They do not sound like the sententiously ambitious sayings of a child-prodigy. They do not make us think of Jesus as of one grown old before His time—one too early withdrawn from the natural interests and simple joys of happy boyhood. Even

with these great words upon His lips, words destined for immortality, He is still to us the sweet, glad-hearted, unaffected son of Mary. And this for the reason that they are so obviously unstudied words. The truth which they convey had not been reached by strenuous processes of reasoning. It was native to His mind. The utterance was as effortless as the shedding of its fragrance by a rose.

In this fact we find the secret of the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ as a religious teacher. He was born into the world with a perfect faculty for knowing and revealing God. No human being ever approached Him in this respect. In the realm of spiritual truth He moved as freely and as buoyantly as a bird in air. His soul was wondrously winged for flight into that upper region. His thoughts towards God were ever "blithesome and cumberless." Though His heart had nest upon the ground in the love of Mary and of Joseph, His spirit made frequent, lark-like flights into the heavens, stripping off a song at every spiral of its ascending, until it touched the bosom of the Eternal; then it would come singing back to earth again to rest contentedly in the affection of those humble human hearts. He knew God in-

tuitively and infallibly. This is why He knew Man and Nature so accurately and profoundly. He approached these problems from the upper side. He came through God to Nature and to Man. Standing in the light of the knowledge of God, He saw through Nature and through Man, through Time and through Eternity.

This first recorded utterance of the Holy Child makes a fitting "foreword" to the gospel afterwards unfolded by the man Christ Jesus. It stands as the "Beautiful Gate" of the Temple of truth erected by His potent words and works. The plan of this massive doorway harmonises perfectly with the architecture of the cathedral to which it gives us entrance. As we linger here we catch the prelude of the song with which the building resounds from crypt to dome.

The message of Jesus from first to last was a message concerning the nature and ways of God. And both these notes are sounded here.

1.

Christ here declares the Fact of God's Fatherhood.

Holman Hunt's conception of the Temple scene as set forth in his picture is delight-

fully suggestive. Jesus has evidently seen His mother as she enters the Temple-court, and hastens, with the love-light in His eyes, to welcome her. As the artist paints the group, they are standing apart from the doctors of the law and the other youths of the Temple school. Mary's arm is laid caressingly around the shoulders of her beautiful son, and her lips are very close to His ear as she whispers to Him the story of the parental anxiety. Joseph stands behind, peering over Mary's shoulder, with an expression of perplexity and affection upon his noble face. They make a charming group, and all their bearing betokens the finest feeling. The artist would have us believe that there was no rushing in of a dishevelled woman, frantic with fear and screaming out reproaches, but rather a tender and dignified reunion of the family, accompanied by a gentle reminder of the lad's filial obligations. But that word "Father" which Mary utters proves to be a kindling word. "Does my Father seek Me? Do you not understand that God is My Father? He does not need to seek Me, for I am ever with Him." There was no unfilialness towards Mary or Joseph in the reply which Jesus gave, but only a loving re-

minder of the relation which He bore to God and of the fact that the higher relation must rule His life. Flashing forth in such sweet, spontaneous fashion from His boyhood's consciousness of God, this word "Father" entered the soul of Mary with the light of a new revelation. It became for her, henceforth, "the master-light" of all her seeing.

And this word "Father" proved to be the master-word of all Christ's teaching. By this He made known the essence of God's character as a God of love. Every great doctrine which He expounded had its roots in this fundamental conception. Not only so, but they were all distinctly stated in terms of the divine Fatherhood.

Consider His doctrine of Providence. The kernel of it all lies in the words, "Be ye not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

Take His doctrine of Prayer. Both the obligation and the encouragement to pray are grounded in the fact of the Fatherhood. "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven." "If ye then,

being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"

Study His doctrine of Repentance. The call to repentance which He issued was in behalf and in the name of God's paternal relation. Sin He viewed as the reign of unfilial feeling in the heart that was made for filial love. To repent was to arise and go to the Father. The great incentive which He gave for turning away from sin was the "joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Also the clearest light in which we can view the Atonement is the light which He shed upon it from the Fatherhood. It was in the fact of the divine Fatherhood that He found the supreme impulse for His atoning work. The end aimed at in the Atonement was the winning back of alienated children to the fellowship of the Father. The means employed were those of sacrificial love. Both were of the Father. "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life. No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.

This commandment received I from My Father."

If we consider His doctrine of Salvation we find the keystone of it all in the great word of assuring promise, "My Father which gave them Me is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

When we think of Heaven it is in terms of the same great word which He gave when He said, "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

In unveiling to men the essential and universal Fatherhood of God, Jesus gave the world its most comprehensive and redemptive revelation of the deity. It was the golden key with which He unlocked the heart of mankind for the incoming of God. He drew it from His girdle that day in the Temple when He was but twelve years old, and still, as the warden of souls, He is using it to open prison doors and give release to men made captive by sin. There is no other key that fits the human heart like this.

The doctrine of God's Fatherhood as Christ proclaimed it was distinctly new to the thought of men. Judaism had

never attained to it. The prophets of Israel regarded Jehovah as holding the relation of father to the nation or to the nation's king. He was even believed to hold the relation to selected individuals in the favoured nation. But there is no record of any pre-Christian thinker ascribing universal Fatherhood to God. Until Christ came the continent of the divine Fatherhood remained, for the greater part, an unknown land. It had been discovered, but not explored. The coast-line had been traced in part, but the interior was as yet untraversed. Christ traversed it, surveyed it, and mapped it. He threaded it with highways, and opened it up for the entrance and habitation of mankind. He told men of the wealth it held, and of the homesteads for their hearts which were waiting there.

2.

The Father's Business.

In this first word of Jesus He also declares His thought of God as immanent in the world, active and enterprising in behalf of men. This, too, was a truth needing fresh and authoritative statement. For this was by no means the prevailing

idea of God. The priests of Judaism conceived of Jehovah as one who dwelt apart from men in secret, inaccessible shrines, within closed doors and behind thick veils. God was only to be approached through the priesthood. He was normally a God at rest. His august leisure must not be disturbed. His majestic calm must not be rudely ruffled by the invasion of trifling human concerns. The priestly notion, so far as it prevailed, made for religious barrenness and deadness. It laid an icicle on the breast of the worshipper which smote his finer enthusiasms down with deadly chill. It tended to paralyse both the sensory and the motor nerves of faith. With God remote, unapproachable, impassive, religion grew formal and passionless. Had not singers and seers arisen to quicken the spiritual pulse of the nation with the thought of God's perpetual presence, the faith of Israel would have withered into a seedless and abortive thing. But the poets and prophets, with their mystic insight, were continually protesting against the hard, cold, deistic creed of the priesthood. They saw God in nature and in history and in the events of their own times. They found Him in the gales of inspiration which smote upon their own

souls. They summoned men to come forth from sluggishness and slumber, and meet God in the duties, the privileges, the perils, and the changes of the days in which they lived. It was their constant aim to bring the sense of a divine presence "home to men's business and bosoms." And it was this idea of God which Christ revived and clarified and accentuated. It stirred His heart in childhood and fired His zeal in manhood. The thought which was continually upon His heart found expression in the words, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work."

The business of the Father as represented by the Son is seen to be the most Urgent Business in the world. The interests which it involves are of superlative importance. It has primarily to do with the relations of men to God upon which their spiritual and eternal destinies depend. Compared with this, all other human interests shrivel into insignificance. He was continually teaching men to put the claims of this business first. He constantly yielded to the supremacy of those claims over His own life. The words which He spoke to Mary in the Temple witness to the sense of compulsion which had thus early gripped His

consciousness: "I *must* be about My Father's business." That feeling burned in His soul with hot intensity until the heavens received Him. Every day of His life gave evidence of His overmastering conviction that He *must* work the works of Him that sent Him.

The Father's business, as interpreted by the Son, is the most Beneficent Business in the world. It was initiated at the dictates of pure love and grace. It is free from taint of selfishness. It involves no wreckage. It aims at nothing less than the perfecting of humanity through restoration to God's fellowship and favour. The first prospectus of the business, as issued by the Son, in the synagogue at Nazareth, proclaims its beneficent intent: "To preach good tidings to the poor; to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

It is the most Profitable Business in the world. It is profitable for the life that uow is, and for that which is to come. It yields a hundredfold in dividends to all its shareholders, now in this time, and in the world to come eternal life.

Its returns cannot be computed in terms of earthly values. Whoever puts his life into this business becomes heir of all things that have real and lasting worthfulness. He becomes the heir of God and a joint-heir with Jesus. In this business he finds his higher self, he finds his God, he finds the life abundant. To gather earthly treasure at the neglect of this business is to see it consumed by the moth and the rust. To associate ourselves with the Father's business is to lay up priceless treasure in a permanent treasury. The interest which this business pays upon our investments goes on compounding for evermore. The premium which Christ paid, in humiliation and in sufferings, that He might control this business, is beyond all computation. It is still the wonder of the world. Yet the business has yielded Him a princely revenue upon that unspeakably vast investment. He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied.

It is the most Highly Capitalised Business in the world. Many a promising enterprise has been hindered in its expansion, crippled in its operations, and compulsorily abandoned through lack of resources. A great deal of that sort of thing has been

taking place of late, owing to the upheaval in Wall Street. Capital has been chilled and its outflow checked. Instead of flowing into the channels of trade and commerce and offering itself for works of development, it has burrowed underground. Men have been hiding their holdings as a dog hides his bone. The result has been disastrous. But the Father's business is never cramped for lack of capital. The infinite riches of divine wisdom and grace and power are behind it. The wealth of the Godhead is at our disposal whensoever we wish to draw upon it. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit wait upon our call. We are not straightened in God, we are only straightened in our own unbelief and timidity. None of us have yet drawn to the full extent of our privilege upon the capital placed to our account. Unclaimed balances await us; but they will not lie unused for ever. What is left unclaimed will ultimately be passed to another account. To him that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not (because he will not take) shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.

It is the most Comprehensive Business in

the world. Whosoever will may become a partner and profit-sharer in the enterprise which brought Christ to the manger and the cross. The Father's business is broad enough to embrace within its operations all the honest work of consecrated hands.

The consecration of any work to God, however humble it may be, raises it to the status of a divine service, and incorporates it into the business. We should always remember that service is more than labour. It has a superadded quality and dignity. One may toil unceasingly yet render no real service. The devil is industrious. The whirlpool and the fountain are equally active, but to far different ends. The one sucks all things into itself to satiate its own omniverous maw; the other yields up its contents for the refreshment of the world. Service is labour baptized and anointed and consecrated to high ends. William Carey, cobbling shoes here in Leicester, pegging away in that dingy little room in Harvey Lane, cobbling them as best he could—though they do say he was never a skilful workman, and that he could not make two shoes alike—yet putting in honest leather, and sound pegs and strong stitches, and consecrating the toil to the

service of God's kingdom, was as truly in the Father's business as was Dr. William Carey, the distinguished Oriental Scholar, when translating languages, preaching the gospel and baptizing converts in India. That little workshop, with its lasts and awls, and hammers and waxed-ends, and scraps of leather, represented a department of the heavenly Father's business. God was in the cobbling trade here in Leicester while William Carey worked in Harvey Lane. And so He is in every trade here and throughout the world where human hands, however rough or hard, are working at the dictates of His will and for the glory of His name. It is the privilege of each disciple to find a service for God in the service of man, and a service for man in the service of God, and thus to become a co-worker with Him whom we call the God-man.

"God's work is one eternal sphere,
Our work a segment of His work,
And he whose spirit eye is clear,
Whose ready will no load would shirk,
May read his name divinely writ
Upon the work for him most fit,
Assigned to him for each new year.
And so no true work comes to naught,
But with God's endless work is wrought
And with eternal glory fraught."

CHRIST AT THE JORDAN

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

But Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon him: and, lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."—MATTHEW iii. 13–17.

CHAPTER III

CHRIST AT THE JORDAN

FOR thirty years Jesus remained in obscurity. Through all that ardent period of youth and early manhood, when we dream of conquests and of crowns, He plied his humble trade in little Nazareth. Aside from the world's thronged highways, away from teeming towns, withdrawn from the political ferment of the time, free from the wrangling of the schools, He lived the sweet and simple life of a poor working-man. But during all this time "the Plant of Renown" was coming to maturity. Jesus took "leisure to grow wise and shelter to grow strong." He would not give the world the green fruit from His boughs. He let the clusters grow to their full size and ripen in the sunlight. By communing deep with God, with nature, with the sacred Scriptures, and with His own soul,

He learned to "see life steadily and to see it whole." Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit vitalising in His soul, the discipline of daily toil, the Spiritual nature of Jesus came at length to perfect fruitage. And then He shed His fruit. Into the winepress He cast Himself, and when the vintage season ended the cup of the world's need was filled with the cordial of a healing grace.

One cannot imagine that the home-leaving of Jesus would be marked by any special excitement. Doubtless the thought of leaving His mother wrenched His heart. But the voice of duty was too clearly calling Him to permit of any inward conflict or confusion. Calmly He would lay aside His hammer and His plane, roll up His apron, put the carpenter-shop in order, pass over the little store of savings (if there was one) to His mother, and turn His steps down into the Jordan valley, where the ministry of His cousin John was creating such unwonted stir.

We may not conjecture about the thoughts which were in His mind that morning, but we may be sure that He took the road with confident, though unhasting step, and that He went with

elation, tempered by serious concern, to this, the first great crisis of His life.

Perhaps there is no other outstanding event in Christ's life of which the significance is so slightly appreciated as that of His baptism. We may readily perceive the meaning of the ordinance so far as the multitude was concerned. Their baptism was the sign of their repentance and of their faith in a coming Messiah. John's mission to the nation had this double purpose to serve: it was meant to stir the national conscience, grown sluggish and feeble, to a keener sense of sin; and it was meant to revive the Messianic expectation, formerly the great, distinctive national hope, but which had long been blanching and for centuries had been voiceless. But what purpose could be served by the baptism of the Messiah Himself? He was separate from sinners and harmless and undefiled. And He knew Himself to be the Messiah. What meaning, then, could the rite of baptism have for Him? The answer is a four-fold one.

1.

The Baptism of Jesus served the Purpose of His Messianic Manifestation.

We do not know that John and Jesus had ever met before. It is almost certain that they had not seen each other for a decade at least. Their paths had run far apart. John had been in the wilderness, living the life of an ascetic, a hermit, and a rapt listener to mystic voices. He had been expecting the early appearance of Messiah, but had not thought to find him in the person of his quiet-mannered carpenter-cousin of Nazareth. John was evidently looking for a sterner and louder Messiah than Jesus proved to be. He was looking for one who should come with axe and fan and fire; but when Messiah appeared, lo! it was with the still, small voice. He was expecting Messiah's Day to be a day of terror, with hurricane and thunderbolts; but when it dawned, lo! it was a lovely day in June, a day with balm in the air and blue in the sky, and a light shining clear after rain. But after the baptism John had no further doubt. We have his own clear testimony. "I knew

him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing with water." "And I saw and bare witness that this was the Son of God."

2.

The Baptism of Jesus served to Declare His Identification with the Cause of Humanity.

At the Jordan Christ made common cause with mankind. That was a motley crowd which gathered to the baptism of John. Jerusalem and Judea had emptied their myriads into the Jordan valley until even John was amazed by the multitude of types represented. There was an *omnium gatherum* of every sort of sinner which the country contained. It represented the human world. When, therefore, Jesus stepped into the stream, it was as though He said, "I am for men; these are My brethren; whatsoever concerns them concerns Me."

It is a noteworthy fact that Jesus began His public ministry upon a full flood of sympathetic feeling for sinful humanity. It was not as a doctrinaire with a pet theory to expound; not as a partizan espousing the cause of a class; not

as a zealot with a little programme of reforms to effect; it was as the Friend of Sinners, the Champion of Humanity, the Redeemer of the Race that He went forth from Nazareth. Humble as His human origin had been, there was in Him no "dread and fear of kings," no inherited prejudice or acquired antipathy against men of wealth and rank. These all had place, along with the common people from whom He sprang, in His inclusive sympathy. Sinless as He was, and exquisitely sensitive to impurity, He did not fear to come into contact with vice and crime. He could handle pitch and not be defiled. He could minister to any sort of moral disease without risk of infection. Thus He was able to include all men within the compass of His ministrant love.

3.

The Baptism served for a Public Consecration to His Sacrificial Mission.

The waters of the Jordan represented for Him the stream of Death, into whose deep, dark tide He was soon to enter that all its waves and its billows might pass over Him. When He rose from the Jordan, uplifted into the sweet air and

gracious light by the sturdy arm of the baptizer, while pearly drops glistened upon His sacred head, He was picturing His coming triumph over the grave, His resurrection from the tomb, His ascension to the free air and light of heaven, and His coronation at God's right hand. The baptism was a complete, dramatic portrayal of His sacrificial work.

From this we learn that the cross was not an afterthought of Christ's public career. He did not adopt it as a last resource after exhausting other means. It was not forced upon Him by the stress of unforeseen circumstances. The cross was carried in His heart consciously and constantly from the beginning. We do not know how early in those years at Nazareth the cross first swung into His line of vision, but one thing is certain, before He left His home He knew what the end would be. Before He stepped across the threshold of His public life He knew Himself to be the Lamb of God sealed for sacrifice.

In this view of the matter the baptism of Jesus was a challenge and defiance waved in the face of death. It was as though He, by that act, planted Himself in the very middle of the channel through

which the torrent of priestly hatred would soon be foaming to whelm Him. He knew that for a moment it would seem to triumph, but for a moment only. Disappearing beneath the death-flood that would oversweep Him on the cross, He would presently reappear, death's Conqueror. Alive for evermore, He would stand as Master of the Flood, with power to draw all whelmed souls forth to the banks of everlasting life.

4.

The Baptism of Jesus presented a Fitting Occasion for God's Attestation to His Divine Sonship.

The heavenly witness was given in a three-fold manner.

"The heavens were opened unto Him." We may not suppose that they were opened to any other view than His. The vision of the glory-land was for Him alone. How unspeakably precious and heartening that vision must have been to Him! On the earthward side the door was opening to misunderstanding and hatred, to suffering and shame. It must have been infinitely comforting to His spirit that at such a moment the door

of heaven opened with its revelation of the sympathetic interest of the Father and the holy angels. In that moment He experienced a foretaste of the "joy unspeakable and full of glory" awaiting Him on the other side of the cross. I believe that to His vision heaven at that moment was in gala dress, with hosts of seraphs crowding the bannered battlements of glory and chanting hallelujah choruses to cheer the Champion of Humanity on to victory.

There was also the heavenly Messenger. "The Spirit of God descending as a dove" rested upon Him. The dove is the emblem of Peace. As it rested that day upon the Messiah it was a token of the peace of God which should keep the heart of the blessed Son through all the days of His earthly pilgrimage. And we know that God's peace abode with Him unto the end:—

> "Peace,
> Deep as the sleep of the sea
> When the stars their faces glass
> In its blue tranquillity."

The dove is the emblem of Hope. Noah's dove returned to the ark with one fresh-plucked leaf in its beak. That was to him the prophecy and pledge of a whole world of

verdure and beauty to emerge from beneath the waters of the deluge. The dove of the Jordan was a pledge to the Christ of a new heaven and a new earth to follow upon His deluge in suffering and death.

The dove is the emblem of Faithfulness. There is a wonderful homing instinct in the heart of the dove, of which men have availed themselves since the days of Noah. May it not be that we have here a hint of the faithfulness of the divine Spirit to His home in the heart of Christ? The soul of Jesus was the chosen nest of the heavenly dove. Nor was it ever abandoned. However far the Son might be tossed upon the billows of temptation or of pain, the Spirit abode with Him, His solace and His strength. Even so will He abide in the soul of every child of God.

The dove was the poor man's Altar-gift. When the worshipper could present no costlier offering, he might bring a dove and be accepted. Does not the descending dove witness to the fact that the poorest of men may avail themselves of the sacrifice of Christ? When we turn to the message with which Jesus a little later opened His teaching ministry we can almost hear the fluttering wings of the heavenly dove in the gracious words, "The

Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor."

Above all, there was the witness of the Father's voice. Whether it was heard by any other ear than that of Jesus we do not know. But He heard it, the Father's word of commendation and of cheer, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The joy which that assurance brought to Jesus is past all telling or imagining. It put the stamp of the divine approval upon all the years that He had lived in Nazareth. It declared that He was fit for the work God had given Him to do.

CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."—MATTHEW iv. 1.

CHAPTER IV

CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS

"THEN"—immediately after the opening to Him of the windows of heaven—the Son of God is led past the very mouth of hell! Before He wins a follower or utters a parable or performs an act of mercy, He is made to prove, by personal contact, the feeling and attitude of both these worlds. Assured of the Divine favour, He must next experience the subtle enmity of Satan. He must get clearly defined in His consciousness the line of battle which the foe has set in array against Him and determine the plan of action by which it shall be met.

The whole conflict in the wilderness was waged around the question of the use that Christ should make of His power.

It is always an epoch-making day in a young man's life when he definitely decides this question. If he can get this question

settled early and settled right he will have done a great thing for himself and for all concerned in him. The door of destiny turns on the hinge of that decision. It is to the young manhood of the world, conscious of its power but undecided what to do with it, that this event of our Lord's life makes its first and most urgent appeal.

It was a matter of infinite moment how Christ should answer this question because He was so supremely endowed with power. His was the most highly energised personality the world has ever seen. He was the consummate Man. His brain was alive with the sense of penetrating insight, and His whole being tingled with the consciousness of power. To such an one as He all careers lay open. He could grasp any crown towards which He cared to stretch forth His hand. He could win any kingdom whose sceptre He cared to wield. He could wear the purple of any dignity which His ambition might covet. Three worlds—the world of angels, the world of demons, and the world of men—were vitally concerned in the issue of the conflict to which the Spirit led Him.

During the hidden years at Nazareth the thoughts of Jesus had been cast into the sacrificial mould. The rod of His will had

budded into redemptive purposes. Is the mould to be preserved, or will it be shattered when it strikes against the hard facts of experience and trial? Shall these buds unfold into flowers rich in the seeds of everlasting life, or must they be nipped and blasted in the frosty air of a sceptical and materialistic age? The wilderness gives the answer. The sacrificial mould is to remain intact. The buds of redemptive purposes are to go on to golden fruitage. The programme of service which the Father had given Him is not to be superseded, but fulfilled to the very letter. The experience of the temptation only served to test and reveal and confirm His life-plan. The tremendous pressure which was put upon Him in the wilderness proved the granitic quality, the adamantine firmness of the basis of that bridge which He came to construct across the gulf of human sin.

Three possible uses for His unrivalled powers were suggested to Jesus by the tempter. They are the same uses of power to which all men of force and genius are liable to be tempted. The first suggestion was that He should use His power for the acquisition of material goods; the second, that He should use it for the excitement of popular applause; and the third was, that

31330

He should use it for the achievement of high political position. Each of these ends may have place on a strong man's programme of life as a means to some higher end. But none of them are worthy to be made supreme. Secondary places they may claim for themselves, in many instances, but to assign first place to any one of them, or all of them combined, results in the degradation of life and the apostasy of being. Whoever would live the life of a son of God must indignantly reject the suggestion of such baneful misdirection of his powers. Christ's rejection of these proposals was instantaneous, indignant and irrevocable. As a fire brand flung into the sea goes at once black, so each suggestion that He should use His power for other than the highest ends fell harmless at His feet.

1.

As to Making Bread out of Stones.

The suggestion looks harmless enough on the surface of it. Why should not Christ use His power to feed Himself? He had dire need of bread in that hour. The hunger that was upon Him after the long fasting was such a hunger as often turns men's brains,

makes them fierce and wolfish, forgetful of honour, and reckless of consequences if only it can be appeased. Surely there could be no harm in one providing himself with bread to feed a hunger like that if he could do it honestly. There is no virtue in self-starvation. We are accustomed rather to think of bread-making as a good business. Since bread is an inexorable necessity of man's physical life, we regard the bread-winners as the honourable of the earth.

Does the objection lie against the proposed method of bread-making? Can any disgrace attach to the making of bread out of stones? By no means. We take honest pride, to-day, in our ability to do that very thing. When we take the coal and the iron from the mine and devote them to a thousand industrial uses, this is what we are really doing—converting stones into bread. It is not in England that one would expect to hear that process adversely criticised, for the bulk of our bread here is derived from stones of one sort and another, put through one process or another. Multitudes of our people would starve should our "captains of industry" forget how to make bread out of stones. Indeed, when we reflect upon it, we discover that the very wheaten bread upon

our tables is literally made out of stones. It all came out of the earth, and the crust of the earth is mostly powdered rock. The farmer growing corn for bread upon his fields, is but adopting a little longer and less direct method of getting bread from stones than that which was suggested to Jesus in the wilderness. So it may look as though Jesus was suffering needless hunger, and that He might profitably have used His power to prepare Himself "a table" there in the presence of His enemy.

Yet the suggestion made to Him was in reality an insult. The point of the skilfully bated hook is uncovered in our Lord's reply, "Man shall not live by bread alone." Satan would have the hungered Christ believe that man could live by bread alone. He was insinuating that bread was man's first and chiefest necessity. It was the rank materialism and implied atheism of the suggestion against which Christ revolted with such horror and detestation. The creed that Satan sought to impose upon Him was very much the creed of the day. But it was no creed for Christ. He would give the world a truer and a better creed than that. He would teach men that they have a higher life to live than that

which is dependent upon bread. Man's highest life is not dependent upon bread at all, but upon truth, upon the "Word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." No one ever lived who so deeply sympathised with man's physical needs as Christ did. He had compassion on the hungry multitudes and fed them. He did take a hand at bread-making for a time, and then he suddenly ceased and refused to make any more. Through all these attitudes of the Master towards the matter of bread-making, there runs a beautiful consistency. He was never indifferent to bodily hunger. When Christ has had His way in the world, there will be no more child-faces, hunger-pinched, and no famishing men in any city of the land. He does not grudge any man the comforts of a home. The best fed peoples of the world live in Christian lands. But Christ is ever putting the soul above the body. He reminds us that we *are* spirits and *have* bodies. He denies that we are mere physical structures which have a thing called soul. That was His position in the wilderness. He took His stand upon the fact of the spirituality of man's nature The relation to God's will was the first thing to be considered. Better starve the body than the soul. And that was His

reason for ceasing to make bread for the multitudes later on in His ministry. The bread which He gave them for their bodies, instead of inciting hunger for the bread of the soul, produced in them an ignoble satisfaction. He would not continue making bread for their physical hunger at the risk of failing to become the Bread of Life in their souls. As for Himself, in His hungering in the wilderness, He knew that God would feed Him in His own good time. He was not forsaken or forgotten.

2.

As to Dazzling the Populace by a Spectacular Miracle.

The occasion for this suggestion was found in the fact of Christ's isolation and loneliness. The wilderness in which the tempter found Him was a solitary place. Christ had been there six weeks alone. John the Baptist would not have felt the loneliness as Jesus did. He loved the desert life, and cared not for the companionship of men. But for one so highly socialised as Jesus was, this isolation must have been a sore trial. Then, too, His aloneness in the wilderness would accentuate in His consciousness the fact that He

stood alone in relation to His life-work. As to disciples and a following from the people, He had everything yet to win. He knew that the winning of them would be slow work. But now the suggestion is made that this work need not be slow. The thing can be done in a moment if He will consent to use His power to dazzle the multitude. The great crowd-assembling centre of Palestine is Jerusalem; thither the tribes go up. And the centre of interest in Jerusalem is the Temple; the crowds flock there. At times the Temple area is black with people. Why not show Himself some day at the Temple top, when the throng is dense below, and while they are gaping up in wonder at Him, suddenly descend through the air and stand in their midst? This will give Him at once a powerful hold upon the popular imagination. The people love a spectacle, and will hail Him with hosannas. It will mean a swift and brilliant escape from this anomaly of solitude and loneliness. Moreover, it is lyingly suggested, this is quite the fitting way for the Messiah to make His entrance upon His priestly ministry. He is Lord of the Temple, and this should be made clear at once. It is not for Him to climb the

Temple steps like an ordinary worshipper; He should descend from above with attendant angels. He must know, from that look which He so recently had into heaven, that cohorts of angels are ready to lackey Him. The dignity of His person as the well-pleasing Son of God demands this course.

It was really a diabolical plot to destroy Christ's priestly service, by attempting to kill in Him the true priestly spirit. In its essence, the temptation of the Temple top is one which has been practised upon successive generations of the sons of God. It is the satanic trick of the ages. For, whenever a son of God is tempted to win popular applause for its own sake, he is tempted to self-degradation. Power is not given us of God that we may dazzle people with it. It is not ours to play with. A man had better play with a live electric wire than with his power over the people, or with the people under the spell of his power. If he trades upon their weaknesses, their superstitions, their prejudices, to win their allegiance, he delivers both himself and them to the devil. Power is for service. A man will get his following if he deserves it, and is ready and capable to lead; but it is not for Christ's disciples

to win it in any other than Christ's way—the way of patient, loving ministry.

3.

Regarding the Achievement of Political Distinction.

The suggestion was that Christ should strike at once for Cæsar's seat. The time was ripe for revolt. The popular discontent was deep and widespread. The land was seething with rebellion. In the political temper of the time it only needed that a great leader should appear and raise the standard of revolt for myriads to flock to his banner. And who so competent to lead as this picturesque and magnificent personality? If He will head the movement, the highways leading to Rome will presently be thronged with tens of thousands, ready to follow Him to death. This was not the only time when such a suggestion was made to Christ. The people of Galilee afterwards begged Him to take this step. They, too, saw the power of a Cæsar in Him. It cannot be doubted that had He used His power in that direction, He could have hurled the Tyrant of the Tiber from his throne, and seated Himself in his place.

But the suggestion had no charms for

Christ. To play the Cæsar for a season would mean nothing to Him who came to be the King of all kingdoms for ever. The retinue of followers who should march beneath the banner of the saviourhood, to be achieved by the way of the Cross, would far outnumber the subjects of any earthly sovereignty. The revenues which would accrue to Him in the love-loyalty of His redeemed, would far outweigh the tribute to be exacted from any earthly empire. But Christ's sovereignty must be won through suffering. His mastery must come through His ministry. His crown must be gained by His cross. He is not seeking a place for Himself, He is seeking a place beside Himself for us, that we may dwell with Him in the favour and fellowship of the Father.

Is not the lesson from all this very clear? If God has entrusted us with any power, it is that we may exercise it on the highest possible level of helpfulness. To devote it to lower ends is to abuse it and ultimately to lose it. If you have power to make bread, make it for others and eat your share with them! Make it for wife and children, and for such others as have no skill or power to make it for themselves! The world is full of them, and God has sent

you to them. By feeding them, the eating of your own portion will be a sweet and wholesome experience. If you have power to excite the admiration or win the allegiance of men, have a care of that! You must not trifle with your fellows. If you have any kingship or queenship in you, make sure to use it for redemptive ends! Sing no song that is not fit for Christ to hear! Paint no picture which you would not dare to hold up before His gaze! Write no book which you would not lay upon His altar! If you can hold a seat in Parliament, hold it for your country's good! The moment you begin to use it for "miserable aims that end with self," you forfeit your right to it. "Follow the Christ: else, wherefore born?"

CHRIST AT THE WEDDING FEAST
IN CANA

"This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory."—JOHN ii. 11.

CHAPTER V

CHRIST AT THE WEDDING FEAST IN CANA

1.

The Changing of the Water into Wine manifested the Glory of Christ's Power.

By that act He showed Himself to be the Lord of Nature. As the immortal line of Crashaw has it—

"The conscious water saw its God, and blushed."

This act of power flings back a light upon the opening words of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." To John's mind the miracle at Cana was a regal gesture de-

noting Christ's sovereignty as Nature's Lord. By reflecting upon this deed and other deeds of Christ's, John came to the conclusion that the universe consisted in Him, and that He was God. Not only did he think of Jesus as able to intervene with creative and energizing power at any point in Nature's processes, but as present in them all, the very spirit of their life. And he regarded Him as holding the same relation to men. From Christ flowed all the tides of being. This is the conception of the Fourth Gospel from beginning to end. It gives colour to everything which John writes concerning the Blessed One. It determines his choice of material for his narrative. Constantly he looks upon Christ as the animating spirit of nature and the Life and Light of men. Around these conceptions he groups his subject-matter. "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name."

John's thought of Christ as the fountain-head of all life for nature and for man, is the great first-truth which the modern mind most needs to grip. In this thought will

be found the regulating and formative principle of Christian theology, and the heart of evangelical religion. It is when we take this view of Jesus that the need of personal union with Him, for the nourishment of spiritual life, is borne in most deeply upon our consciousness. Why should it be thought strange that man needs the impact of Christ's Spirit upon him in order to come to fullness of life? If we accept John's view of Christ, man shares this necessity with every created thing that lives. One power, and that a divine power, sows life in sea, in soil, in soul. The energy which sprouts the seed in the sod, and forms the bud upon the plant, and unfurls the emerald banners of the leaves upon the boughs, is identical with the energy which makes for beauty of holiness in the human soul, and brings the fruits of righteousness to perfection in the moral life of man. The stir in the bulb of the lily, by which it breaks its bed and emerges into light, the stir in the brain of the child, by which it comes to knowledge of itself and of the world around it, the stir in the heart of the penitent, by which he breaks from the bondage of sin and rises into the fellowship of God, are all due to the inworking of one divine spirit.

Wherever we find a manifestation of life, we are to recognise a spiritual force at work. This, indeed, is the great first-truth set before us upon the opening pages of the Bible. In the earliest chapters of Genesis, world-beauty and soul-bloom are traced to a single source. There is a notable parallel between the stories told there of the beginning of life in nature and in man. Before the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, "the earth was waste and void." No light shone, no flower bloomed, no bird sang, until over the weltering chaos the Spirit brooded. It was the same in the case of man. He, too, was waste and void until the Spirit imparted the vital soul-spark. It was when the Lord God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" that the light of reason and of conscience leaped up within the hitherto dark temple of his body, "and man became a living soul."

This great first-truth of the Book of Genesis and of the Gospel according to John flashes forth in the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth:

so is every one that is born of the Spirit." It is no more strange that man should need to be born from above in order to see the kingdom of God, than that the earth should need the miracle of the springtime in order to bring forth her fruits. Man can make a hot-house, but only God can make a spring.

This manifestation of the glory of Christ's power which the Cana miracle affords, not only accentuates our need of personal, spiritual union with Him, but also begets a mighty Hope concerning the Fullness of Life to follow upon that union. When we think of the abundant life which is manifested in the Nature-world around us—the vast and luxuriant forest-growths, the valleys filled with corn, the prairies billowy with wheat, the mountains clothed with pastures; when we remember that over all the earth the springtime comes, year after year, for centuries and milleniums without a failure, we get a tremendously impressive reminder of the infinite fullness of life in Him who is the source of all. In the light of this recurrent miracle of the springtime we behold new deeps of meaning in the words of Jesus, "I came that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." Shall the sparrow be

fed and the soul be famished? Will He clothe the grass of the field in splendour and leave the spirit of man in squalor? To entertain the grim suspicion for a moment is preposterous. In Him there is a store of vital power, "Enough for each, enough for all, enough for evermore."

This fullness of power resident in Christ is also the ground of our hope for ultimate Deliverance from the Blight of Sin. From my study window in Toronto I used to look each day, during a long Canadian winter, upon a tree to which the dead leaves clung with stubborn grip. Autumn gales could not shake them off; drenching rains could not wash them off; pelting hailstorms could not beat them off; winter blizzards could not tear them off; but when the springtime came and the sap began to flow within the tree, new buds formed and pushed them off. They fell before the conquering touch of life. The expulsive power of an irresistible vitality stripped the tatters from the tree and converted it into a bower of bewitching greenery. As old leaves cling to trees so do old habits cling to the souls of men. Rags of a dead past tatter them. Winds of emotion cannot shake them off; rains of repentance cannot

wash them off; hailstorms of affliction cannot pelt them off; but "the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" surging up within the soul, can crowd them off.

Also from the fact of Christ's power as the Lord of Life, our Hope of Immortality springs winged and radiant. One dark December day a little party of us visited Westminster Abbey. It was such a London day as puts a chill into the marrow of your bones and a gloom into your soul. An hour spent amid the royal tombs left us dull and spiritless. We had looked upon venerable and impressive things, exquisite carvings in oak and marble, recumbent effigies of kings and queens in alabaster. But it was all dark and musty and depressing. It all smelt of death. Leaving the tombs, we went over to the Poets' Corner, and upon the slab, beneath which rests the dust of Robert Browning, we saw a wreath of roses lying fresh and sweet. On the silken ribbon which bound the wreath, we read these words: "Never say of me that I am dead." To us the most eloquent thing in the Abbey at that moment was the wreath of roses on the poet's tomb. It was the single suggestion of life in that great gathering-place of Britain's illustrious dead. But it

was enough to warm our hearts. It interpreted everything else. Presently we walked out into the chill mist again, but we carried a glow within our souls. He who made the roses bloom would not deny, we were assured, the gift of life to man. The roses, though clipped from the plant on which they grew, were still fresh and sweet. And the soul of Browning, we believed, was fresher and sweeter still, where in that other life he walked with Christ. The life Christ gives is too potent to be choked by the dust of the tomb. In our experience that day, Christ's "life was the light of men."

2.

The Miracle at Cana Manifested the Glory of Christ's Sympathy.

It is noteworthy that Christ's first miracle was wrought, not to save a life, or redeem a soul, but to relieve a temporary domestic embarrassment. The failure of the wine was merely a social inconvenience likely to somewhat mar the wedding festivities and perhaps humiliate a sensitive host in the eyes of his guests. The kindness of Jesus in relieving the situation associates Him for all time with the simple

joys and sorrows of humble domestic life. We cannot forget that only a little while before He had refused to use His creative power to make bread for His own hunger. Now He employs it to make wine for others' joy. It is of a piece with His whole career of wondrous unselfishness. He made everything for others, nothing for Himself. The same chapter in Matthew which reports five miracles wrought for the relief of other needy lives, records His saying, "The Son of man hath not where to lay His head."

It is a marvellous interblending of the glory of power and the glory of sympathy which this first miracle displays. And each glory enhances the other. The one thing necessary to complete the glory of strength is sympathy. The one thing necessary to complete the glory of sympathy is strength. Where power is pitiless you have a carnival of destructiveness; where pity is powerless you have an agony of helplessness; where power and pity meet and blend you have a triumph of beneficence. Strength without sympathy brutalises men; sympathy without strength effeminates them; but strength controlled by sympathy and sympathy enabled by strength makes men heroic. Ruskin, in "Modern Painters," writes:

"Elephantine strength may drive its way through a forest and feel no touch of the boughs, but the white skin of Homer's Atrides would have felt a bent rose leaf, yet subdue its feeling in glow of battle, and behave itself like iron. I do not mean to call an elephant a vulgar animal, but if you think about him carefully you will find that his non-vulgarity consists in such gentleness as is possible to elephantine nature; not in his insensitive hide, nor in his clumsy foot, but in the way, he will lift his foot if a child lies in his way and in his sensitive trunk, and still more sensitive mind, and capability of pique on points of honour. In fact, heroic strength is not conceivable without such delicacy."

The spirit of sympathetic helpfulness manifested in Christ's first miracle was characteristic of all His after deeds of power. All His miracles are remarkable for their refining and transforming grace. Whatever change they wrought heightened the value of the thing He touched. The water in the stone pots at Cana was intended to be used for washing. It was there, according to the custom of the Jews, for "purifying." What they meant for outward cleansing He transformed into a means of inward strengthening. The

miracle was thus a "sign" of His spiritual mission. It was a token of the enriching and ennobling change which should pass, at His touch, upon all the common things of life, and the new relation He should give them to the inner needs of man.

This first miracle of Jesus bears certain deep and subtle affinities to His last parable—that of the Vine and the Branches. Is it not, indeed, the function of the Vine to change water into wine? What the grape-vine does with the water poured out by the clouds, is it not essentially the same thing that Jesus did with the water poured from the jars at Cana? The change which Jesus wrought was instantaneous, and, effected without the intervention of a material vine-stalk. Jesus Himself took the place of the vine-stalk that day, and, by virtue of the energy resident in His own spirit, abbreviated the processes of Nature to produce the surprising result. What a glory streams forth from the parable when we interpret it in the light of the miracle! Christ, our Vine-stalk, is for us the alchemist of life. If we abide in Him, whatever flows into us must flow through Him. He becomes the mediating and transforming medium by which all things are made sweet and wholesome and nourishing for

us. Snow and rain may fall upon a vineyard, bitter juices may permeate its soil, dead things may be buried there, but the vine-stalk sends nothing but sweet sap into the branches. Out of afflictions, out of disappointments, out of dead hopes and decayed ambitions Christ can extract for those who abide in Him the wine of joy.

One of the finest sights at Hampton Court is the royal grape-vine when loaded with its summer clusters. As a party of Americans were admiring the vine, one of their number called to the keeper and asked, "Could you not give us a few of those grapes?" The answer was given very gently and courteously, but it was decisive and significant. "There is only one man in the kingdom, sir, who could give you grapes from this vine." "And who is he?" the visitor inquired. "His Majesty the King." There is only one Man in the universe who can give you the ripe and perfect fruits of the Spirit, His Imperial Majesty, the Christ.

"This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory."

CHRIST IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF NAZARETH

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read."—Luke iv. 16.

CHAPTER VI

CHRIST IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF NAZARETH

A TENDER human interest attaches to this visit of Jesus to Nazareth. Doubtless, one influence which strongly drew Him there was His yearning desire to see His mother. The bond between Jesus and Mary was of the closest and most affectionate kind. She must have been a woman of rare purity of mind and unusual spiritual capacity to have been selected for the honour of becoming the mother of the Messiah. If our Roman Catholic friends go to an unwarranted extreme in ascribing to her an almost equal rank with Christ, and in paying her divine honours, Protestants swing to the other extreme in practically setting her aside, in their thought, from all relation to the redemptive mission of her son. Yet there was no one, not excepting the beloved disciple, John, who understood Him better, or sympathised more fully with His purpose. Mary was always laying up

His words and pondering them in her heart. With her maternal intuitions, wrought upon and disciplined by the Holy Spirit, she must have seen deeply into the secret of the life of her holy son. From her, in all probability, Luke got the information given in his gospel concerning our Lord's infancy, as he also got the story of this visit. We may be very sure that Jesus loved her more tenderly than any other son ever loved a mother. She was never permitted to bear any burdens from which He could give relief. In filial respect and in affectionate attention His relations to her were ideal.

They tell us that the hill behind the town of Nazareth is a wonderful place for wild flowers. Often, as a child, must Jesus have plucked them for His beautiful mother; and now that He has grown to manhood, now that He has entered upon His public career, now that He has climbed the mountain-tops of spiritual vision, shall He not carry home to her some of the fragrant thought-flowers which He has plucked upon the heights? Naturally there would be much that He would want to say to Mary, and we may be sure that He would turn His steps towards Nazareth with keen delight. After the thrilling

experiences at the Jordan and in the wilderness, and after the brief tour in Galilee, where He had won quick fame, a little visit with His mother would be surpassing sweet to Him and to her.

The home itself would also appeal to Him. It was the only home He could remember, and He loved it. He would sleep again in His own bed. He had known none like it since He left it. Mary herself would make it for Him, and see that it was aired and comfortable. The simple meals would be prepared by her own hands. And there would be hours of close, earnest, reverent conversation. He would want to see His brothers, too, and tell them something of His experiences in the strange, new life.

He would have a tender feeling also for His fellow-townsmen. Though Nazareth was a wicked little town (most little towns are wicked), there must have been some good men there. We do not know that He had ever enjoyed an intimate friendship among them, but we cannot doubt His loving concern for their spiritual enlightenment.

And now the Sabbath day has come, a Sabbath in the sweet Palestinian springtime, when all the air is full of balm, and

all the land is bright with flowers. He has taken His place amongst the worshippers in the synagogue. At a signal from the ruler, who would be quick to notice the presence of an honoured member whose face had been much missed of late, He stands up in the appointed place to read the Scripture lesson for the day. The roll of the book of Isaiah having been delivered unto Him, He unwinds it until He comes to the sixty-first chapter, when He proceeds to read the glowingly prophetic words of the first two verses. According to the custom of the time, He stood up to read, but sat down to expound the portion He had read.

The earlier portion of the address which He delivered proved to be a spellbinder. The opening sentences chained the attention of the congregation. They "fastened their eyes" on Him in wonder. Their enthusiasm was speedily aroused, so that they hung with delight upon His gracious words. By nod and smile and whispered word they showed their appreciation of His treatment of the beautiful Messianic passage. It was one with which they were all familiar, and it voiced their most cherished hopes. It had often awakened music in their hearts, but they had never

seen its beauty so clearly, or felt its force so deeply, as in those moments when Jesus gave it exposition. In this, the earlier portion of His discourse, Jesus was evidently dealing with the general scope of the passage, and pointing out its large promises of relief for the bound and bruised and burdened life of Israel. Whether He had ever before expounded the Scriptures in that synagogue we do not know; but if He had done so, one would suppose that previous tastes of His quality as a teacher would have led them to expect a treat from "Joseph's son."

But pleasure and approval were of short duration. A sudden turn was given to the address, and instantly the congregation was aghast with consternation. Quietly, but distinctly, He announces that He Himself is the Messiah pictured in the passage just expounded. The statement was a spark flung into a powder-magazine. There was a moment's silence, followed by a roar of angry and protesting voices. Never had such a bomb been exploded in that synagogue before. They could scarcely believe the evidence of their senses. Old patriarchs, accustomed to yield themselves to quiet reverie in the house of God, bristle up and choke with

rage. Younger men scowl and clinch their fists. This carpenter neighbour of theirs, who has hitherto lived so serenely in their midst, must have had his brain turned during his recent travels. But no, he has not the ways of a madman; he is rather a shameless blasphemer, mocking at their most sacred Scriptures. But they know how to deal with this wolf in sheep's clothing. They will make quick disposition of Him and of His claims. One simple test will decide the question of His claims. He must work a miracle at their dictation. If He has the power ascribed to Messiah, He must use it now to give them an unmistakable sign. They have heard rumours of miracles wrought by Him in Capernaum; but Capernaum is far away, and rumour is unreliable. Let Him give them an exhibition here and now of His supernatural power. It is the wilderness suggestion over again. Jesus, reading their thoughts before they can find expression in speech, gives His answer. It is an emphatic refusal to make such use of His power. He will not call upon it at the bidding of angry unbelievers. He does not cater to such a temper; it would be both useless and degrading. He may use that power to encourage faith, but not to

batter down prejudice, or disarm hatred, or satisfy a vulgar curiosity. He will save His miracles for such times and places and purposes as befit His spiritual mission. Nazareth, His own home-town is not good ground for miracle working. The inveterate scepticism which neighbours entertain concerning the high calling and destiny of those whom they have known long and familiarly is proverbial. A man must win his recognition from the outside world before his own townsmen will greatly believe in Him. Elijah found it so, and Elisha too. They did not work their miracles at home. Jesus puts Himself in the line of prophetic succession in refusing to cast His pearls down there for those swine to trample on. So they have their answer, and it adds fuel to the fires of their wrath. Enough of this; the impostor must be crushed. Nazareth is already in sufficiently bad repute, without breeding within its borders a monster of blasphemy like this and turning Him loose upon the nation. So they rise up in a body, surround Him, and sweep Him along with them to the brow of the hill overlooking the town, intending to fling Him headlong down the cliff. But lo! their hands are holden. With that strange

power which often enables a calm, majestic personality to quell the frenzy of a mob, even by a gesture or a look, Jesus turns to them, and for a moment awes them by the regal dignity of His bearing. That moment is sufficient to defeat them. While one is waiting for another to rush upon Him and cast Him from the cliff, He passes through the midst of them and goes His way.

Let us not blame them overmuch, those mistaken men of Nazareth! It was not in human nature for them to do much differently. Under similar circumstances the same thing would have happened in England.

That scene has long since passed into history. Of the men who enacted it but one name survives. That name shines in splendour now above every name that is named. We believe to-day that Jesus of Nazareth was what He claimed to be—the Messiah of Israel and the Saviour of the world. The robe of prophecy which He that day wrapped about Himself befits His form. The centuries have proclaimed Him Lord. Two milleniums have placed their crowns upon His brow. And this because He has proved in human experience His power to carry out the programme of

service which He announced in the synagogue at Nazareth. He has shown Himself to be the Comforter of the poor, the Healer of the blind, the Deliverer of the bound.

1.

Jesus is the Poor Man's Friend.

Born into a poor man's family, working at a poor man's trade, living on a poor man's fare, He has won His largest following from the poor man's ranks. Nothing but a caricature of the "Good Tidings" which He proclaimed and a corruption of the Church which He established can ever alienate the world's poor people from the Christ. It is true that in France and in Russia to-day tens of thousands of the common people curse the Church and openly avow their desire to crush the Christian religion. But it is not the real Christ with whom they have broken, nor is it the true Church which they have renounced. It is the ghastly misrepresentation of Christ and His Church given by a tyrannous and corrupt priesthood from which they have revolted. Let them see the Christ of the Gospels and they will fall at His feet. Let them see the Church in her early simplicity and

faith and sympathy, and they will flock to her shelter and communion like doves to their windows. The coign of vantage for preaching the gospel to the poor is the carpenter-shop of Nazareth. It is not the Christ with the invented nimbus about His brow who can win the working-men of the world, but the Christ with tools in His hands and the sweat of toil upon His face.

The gospel which Jesus proclaimed is a gospel to ennoble the poor man's lot. It teaches him a new self-respect; it proclaims the dignity of labour; it puts a premium upon manhood and discounts the value of gold; it reminds him that property cannot be weighed in the scales against character; it shows him that character may find its motive and its discipline in a cottage as well as in a palace; it teaches him that heaven opens as wide and free above the poor man's roof as over the mansions of the rich. It puts a golden ladder at the poor man's feet, on which he may climb to the full height of his possibilities as a son of God. So effective has the gospel been in persuading men of these realities that thousands of the sons and daughters of wealth have voluntarily dispossessed themselves of riches to become

in fuller measure the children of the Lord But even where poverty is of necessity and not of choice; where it presses and pinches and cramps; where it means lack of food, and clothing, and medicine, and sunshine, and fresh air, as it means so often in the crowded cities of the world; where it is the dark shadow that follows man's greed and cruelty and lust; where it is most pathetic, most tragic, most sullen, most hopeless; even there the gospel taught by Him who "had not where to lay His head" can bring cheer and hope. Comté instituted what he termed "Man's Supper." He and his disciples would sometimes celebrate it by sitting down to a meal of bread and water, in memory, they said, of the many who could procure no more than bread and water for their needs. It was a noble sentiment, and one to be applauded by every lover of humanity. But in so far as it was intended to displace the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, it was, to say the least, a dismal mistake. For it still remains true in Christian experience that the real "Man's Supper" is the Lord's Supper, which turns the thought of the celebrant, however poor he may be, to Him who gave Himself to be the Bread of Life for all mankind.

2.

Jesus is the World's Great Healer.

The inaugural message at Nazareth predicts a double work of healing. It proclaims the Messiah as physician both to heart and mind. His mission is equally to "the broken-hearted" and to "the blind." These ministries are intimately related. Broken hearts are frequently the result of blinded minds. Half our troubles would disappear if we had better soul-sight. Our hearts are often in panic because our minds are in darkness. Amid dark shadows, harmless and even friendly things assume threatening and terrifying shapes. There is a wonderfully close relation between blindness and broken-heartedness.

The men of Christ's day did not suspect that they were blind. They considered themselves open-eyed and clear-seeing men. Yet they failed under each test which He submitted. He took the mirror of the law, wiped off the dust which commentators had flung upon it, and held it up all brightly polished, that men might see themselves in it. Yet there was only here and there a soul that had sight enough left to discover its

own spots and stains. He held before them the mirror of His own pure life, and while a few men like Simon Peter, and a number of women like Mary Magdalene, caught swift, clear vision of their inward pollution, the rest remained unconcerned. When He gave them the parable of the Good Samaritan, it was as though He had put a field-glass into their hands to test their power of identifying the man who was their neighbour. But they failed again. And because the eyes of man's understanding were thus weak and blurred, He received commission from the Father to correct the organ of vision.

If we inquire into the method by which Christ gives recovery of sight to the blind, one fact stands out in impressive clearness, viz., that He opens the eyes of the understanding by winning the obedience of the will. His whole system of treatment is based upon the principle "if any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching." The quickening of the soul's optic nerve comes as a consequence of the obedient action of the heart. Disobedience closes the darkening shutters upon the spiritual eye; obedience unfolds them and lets in the light of truth. Where the will refuses to move at the impulse

of His command, the understanding of spiritual things continues darkened. Always the question of sight or blindness relates itself in the last analysis to that of obedience or disobedience. The objective point upon which the divine oculist works is the sinner's will. Coiled there lies the spring that will open or close for him the gates of day.

3.

Christ is Mankind's Redeemer.

In the Messianic manifesto there is reference to the two-fold nature of our Lord's redeeming work. He brings deliverance to the "captives" and sets at liberty "them that are bruised." The captives are those who have been taken in war. The bruised are those who have been crushed beneath the hand of the oppressor. And is not the world of to-day full of men and women who need this two-fold redemption? To the power of sin they are captive; under the weight of misfortune they are crushed. We are not long in this world, if we are living without Christ, before we become both bound and bruised. Bad habit binds us, and the wheel of judgment breaks us. Only one hand can cut the cords of

our captivity and lift us from the cog-wheels that grind men into dust. That hand the Christ holds forth. To Him let the prayer arise, "Come, Great Deliverer, come!"

CHRIST CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

"And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and he made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the changers' money, and overthrew their tables; and to them that sold doves he said, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise. His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house shall eat me up. The Jews therefore answered and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews therefore said, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he spake this; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said."—John ii. 13–22.

CHAPTER VII

CHRIST CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

THERE were two things which Jesus was always concerned to do whenever He visited Jerusalem. One of these was to boldly assert His Messianic claims, and the other was to advance, in memory-haunting phrase, some fresh, high doctrine concerning God. We can readily understand how it was that Jerusalem, more than any other city, called forth these claims and doctrines. Jerusalem was the heart of the nation, the seat of ecclesiastical authority, and the centre of priestly power. There the religious system of the nation culminated. There the great feasts were celebrated. There religious arrogance and bigotry and intolerance came to a head and showed their most threatening front. Always, in Jerusalem, He would have before Him in full view the evidence of Israel's fossilized faith. On every hand

it was manifest that the law had been mechanically interpreted and its spiritual quality obscured. The ritual of worship, intended to serve as a window to let in the light of truth upon the soul, had been converted into a shutter to keep it out. Hence it was that in Jerusalem His Messianic consciousness came to its highest sensitiveness, and His holy indignation was raised to its whitest heat. Here at the centre of national life and feeling He felt the compulsion to utter Himself in boldest terms. Whatever He might do in Capernaum along the lines of quiet, patient, teaching ministries, in Jerusalem He felt compelled to so speak and act as to shake the seats of the mighty and wake the slumbering priesthood from delusive dreams.

The cleansing of the Temple was an act of this sort. It was a startlingly bold assertion of His Messianic authority. To interfere with any of the established customs of the Temple was in itself a claim to regal rights in Israel. It would be a conspicuous supplanting of the authority of the Sanhedrin and the Temple officials. It would mean that he who dared to do it held himself superior to priestly authority and unimpeachable by ecclesiastical

law. The act was thus interpreted, and Jesus intended it to be so.

The circumstances which occasioned the act constituted a flagrant abuse of Temple privileges, and justify the extraordinary procedure of Jesus to every thinking mind. The abuse had grown up gradually and stealthily. Worshippers coming from remote parts of Palestine and regions beyond found it necessary to purchase in Jerusalem the materials required for Temple offerings. These materials included bullocks, goats, lambs, doves, meal, oil, salt, and frankincense. Of course the nearer to the Temple these could be procured, the more convenient it would be for the worshipper. Dealers in these commodities, competing with each other for patronage, had crept nearer and nearer to the sacred precincts until they had actually established themselves in the outer Temple court. There, too, were the tables of the money-changers. "Every Jew had to pay into the Temple treasury an annual tax of half a shekel, and this tax could only be paid in the sacred currency. No foreign coin, with its emblem of submission to an alien king, was allowed to pollute the Temple. Thus there came to be need of money-changers, not only for the Jew who came up to the feast from a

remote part of the Empire, but even for the inhabitant of Palestine, as the Roman coinage had displaced the shekel in ordinary use." These money-brokers had followed the traders into the Temple court. One can imagine the pandemonium which must have reigned there when a great multitude came up for a feast like the Passover. The bleating of the lambs, the bellowing of the bullocks, the shouting and pushing and wrangling of the greedy traders and their touts, the shuffling of coins and the haggling about discounts on the strange money exchanged, would all combine to make the scene one of disgraceful uproar and a lamentable profanation of the sacred place.

Jesus, entering the Temple area, finds Himself in the midst of this abominable desecration. To the depths of His reverent soul He is stirred with indignation. Is this the House of God? Is this the place of prayer? With flashing eyes He views the crowd of hucksters, whose unrestrained commercial instincts have made it "a house of merchandise," and whose insatiate greed has degraded it into "a den of thieves." The hateful scene makes swift, strong challenge to His Messianic consciousness. It flings, as it were, the glove into His face,

as though to defy His spiritual lordship. Unhesitatingly, but with full appreciation of all that His act involves, He accepts the challenge. The zeal for the honour of His Father's name, which was ever glowing in His soul, bursts suddenly into consuming flame. Gathering a handful of discarded baggage-cords lying loosely amidst the litter of the place, He braids them into a whip, and then, with uplifted arm and commanding look, clears the court of traffickers and merchandise.

The sternness of the act, the indignation displayed, and the threat of physical force make this an unparalleled incident in our Lord's life. Some may feel that it mars the story of His otherwise meek and patient ways. I do not share that feeling in the slightest degree. If I believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lord of the Temple, and the divine Son of God, I must believe Him to be the head and source of all legislative and administrative authority in the kingdom of God. All other authority is delegated from Him. When His underlings default in duty there can be nothing undignified or incongruous in His direct and personal dealing with the situation.

No doubt the deed was freely discussed and savagely criticised. It would be a chief

topic of conversation at every table in Jerusalem that evening. The cattle-dealers and the money-changers would be hot with resentment over their loss of business. Sanhedrists and priests would be aflame with indignation because of the usurpation of their functions. Conservative gentlemen of the city would deprecate the excitement aroused. A few, perhaps, would hail it as a timely and necessary reform. Many would be full of conjecture concerning the dignity of demeanour and the compelling power of a personality that was competent to accomplish the deed. Some would believe on Him as the Messiah. From every view-point it was one of the most important acts of the Messiah's career. And it was never forgotten while He lived. At every great feast thereafter priests and people alike looked for His face and wondered as to what He might do next. From that day onward it was well known to Jerusalem that a new force had appeared in the nation's life, and they watched Him.

The curiosity and confusion of opinion regarding one who could do this thing reflect themselves in the query put to Him, "What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?" It was a foolish question, for the deed was its own

clear sign. It spoke for itself. It was its own vindication and interpretation. It was a token of Messiahship. Therefore, Jesus gave them their answer in an enigma: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They did not understand the saying, but they remembered it. It stuck like a barbed arrow in the minds of these Jerusalem Jews and festered there. When on trial for His life, they raked up a garbled form of the saying and put it in as evidence against Him, to prove that He was a mischief-maker, a peace-disturber, and a blasphemer. But for us the answer of our Lord is full of spiritual illuminations. In the light of that reply the whole incident glows with significance and splendour. If we look steadily at this word, with an eye to mark its suggestions and implications, we shall discover the very heart of the gospel in it.

1.

In the first place, it reminds us that the True and Eternal Shrine, at which Man meets God and God meets Man, is the Person of Jesus Christ.

The word which Jesus used in His reply to the Jews is better rendered "Shrine" than "Temple." The Temple was the entire

edifice, and included everything within the sacred area; the shrine was the sanctuary which only the high priest might enter. "Break up this shrine," He said, and in three days I will rear it again. He made good His claim to the possession of this reconstructive power in the resurrection. By that achievement, He opened to humanity a new Holy of Holies, filled with the true Shekinah glory. Into that sacred shrine humanity is invited to enter. Through the rent veil of Christ's flesh the access is free. The shrine was for the moment overthrown when Christ died on the cross; but it was rebuilded, never to be disturbed again, when He rose from the dead. The true sanctuary of souls is there, in the heart of Christ. It is spacious enough to serve as the gathering-place for all mankind. There God dwells in glory; there He meets man in grace.

2.

This Word of Jesus also reminds us that every Life in touch with Him becomes a Lesser Shrine, "for the Habitation of God through the Spirit."

This thought is worked out into fulness by the apostle Paul. "Know ye not that

your body is a shrine of the Holy Spirit that is in you?" God is not content to dwell in Christ alone, else He had not sent Him into this world to be made flesh and to tabernacle with us. He seeks a shrine in the secret chambers of the human soul, where He can commune with man. Not in Jerusalem, nor in the mountain of Samaria is His sanctuary to be found, but in the humble, believing, contrite heart. The supremest glory of a human life is this, that it may come to be a shrine where God appears and manifests His face.

3.

Christ the Central Shrine, with His Believing People as Associated Shrines, are to constitute the grand, completed Temple Eternity.

This was the golden dream of Christ and His apostles. In their thought the individual lives of believers are regarded as the numerous lesser shrines, each opening into the great central shrine, and accessible from it, and all together builded into one glorious temple of God. The idea is exemplified in the great cathedrals of Christendom. One of the chiefest charms of these imposing edifices is found in the quiet chapels, the

sweet and simple prayer-places to which the worshipper may retire from the distracting presence of the multitude which throngs nave and transepts and choir. But all these lesser shrines are associated with the grand, central shrine. They are all "builded together" into one glorious house of God. And this is the relation which we may bear to Christ. Our lives, humble as they are, may become sanctuaries opening into the heart of Christ, and accessible to weary souls who seek God at some lowly shrine.

4.

God's Shrines must be kept fit for Holy Uses.

They must be clean. And if they are to be clean they must be cleansed from within, from the central shrine. Christ, who is High Priest as well as shrine, must purify us with the spirit of His own life. That is what it means to have a heart sprinkled with the blood of Jesus. This cleansing work is one that needs repeating. Jesus cleansed the Temple at Jerusalem twice; once at the beginning, again near the end of His ministry.

There must be order and quietness at the shrine. All the approaches must be made

attractive and harmonious with the purpose for which the Temple is builded as a meeting-place for God and men. In every Christian life, and in every Christian church these qualities should be found—a holy calm, a brooding peace, a warmth of fellowship, a glow of love, and a glorious light of truth. Where there are traffic and barter and competition and selfish shouldering in the courts of the Temple, the light at its centre will be dimmed, and its oracles be dumb. Where the courts are clean and a cloistered stillness invites, men find their way through men to God, and through God to other men.

CHRIST AT JACOB'S WELL

"So he cometh to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph: and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water."—JOHN iv. 5–7.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRIST AT JACOB'S WELL

THE success of Christ's brief mission to the Samaritan city of Sychar is in striking contrast to the results which attended His work in Jerusalem, and those which followed in the Galilean city of Capernaum. The atmosphere of Jerusalem was too political, while that of Capernaum was too commercial to favour a general response to high spiritual appeals. In Samaria, however, though there was much vice and ignorance and prejudice, there still remained something of simplicity, something of what we may term spiritual wistfulness, that opened the door for Him into the hearts of the people.

It was a source of deep satisfaction to Jesus to win this spiritual triumph so early in His ministry. He came to Jacob's well, on the outskirts of the city, weary and hungry and thirsty, in spirit as well as in body. But

whilst the disciples were gathering provisions for their bodily hunger, He gathered a royal feast for His soul. When they returned to the well they found Him refreshed, elated, triumphant. And while they were wondering who had brought Him food, a crowd of eager people from the city appeared in view. Jesus, pointing joyously to the on-coming multitude of inquirers, turned to His disciples and said, in effect, "I have been feasting upon the first-fruits of the harvest, that is waving ripe for your sickles in yonder approaching throng. Thrust in and reap! It is a time of special opportunity. You have not expected such a sudden development, I know. Discouraged by the reception in Jerusalem, you have been thinking that it must take a long time to move any community into sympathy with My Messianic mission. You have been repeating the proverb of the farmer, that long months must always intervene between the seed-sowing and the harvest. But here is a harvest ripened in a day. I dropped a handful of seed into the soul of that woman whom you saw here a little while ago, and whom you were inclined to scowl upon, and lo, from that sowing, this quick harvest of interest has ripened. This whole community is prepared

to receive me now, in My Messianic capacity. You have not laboured to produce this harvest, but I have laboured, and the woman has laboured, and it is for you to enter into our labours."

Yes, it was a great joy for Jesus to win this early triumph, and that without any display of miracle, but only through the revelation of His mind and heart. He had come to that well a wayfarer, travel-stained and weary, and he had won His welcome solely by the manifestation of His wisdom, sympathy, and grace. Nor was the triumph short-lived. Samaria continued to be good ground for the gospel. In after years the disciples reaped splendid harvests there. After Pentecost, when the storm of persecution broke forth in Jerusalem, and the scattered disciples went everywhere preaching the word, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ, and the people gave heed with one accord unto the things that were spoken by Philip. . . . And there was much joy in that city."

It is a significant fact that Samaria was opened to evangelism through the medium of a woman of low, social rank, and of ill-repute. She was the latch of the door which Christ found ready for His hand. It is one

of those instances in which the humblest of means has been used to achieve the most far-reaching results, and it warns us against despising the possibilities of service which may lie latent in the most unpromising lives.

The whole story of our Lord's dealing with this woman is full of pathetic interest, and it makes one of the brightest pages of the gospel. In this incident we see Him engaged in doing the very sort of work for which, in His manifesto at Nazareth, He claimed to be appointed and anointed. Here was one in whose life were all the sorrowful conditions He had enumerated there. Here we behold Him at the task of preaching good tidings to one who was poor, healing one who was broken-hearted, proclaiming release to one who was bound, recovering sight to one who was blind, and setting at liberty one who was bruised. Here we see the Master-workman at His chosen work.

In reflecting upon the manifesto at Nazareth, we noted that the root trouble of all the sad list of troubles mentioned there was that of blindness. Poverty, captivity, broken-heartedness, and bruises are all the consequences of darkness which has drifted down upon the soul. Observe how that fact

is emphasized by the Master's treatment of the woman at the well! He traces all her sins and sorrows back to her lack of spiritual discernment. He finds the secret of all her evil and wretched life in her ignorance of spiritual realities. He puts His finger upon the occasion of all her misdeeds and misfortunes when He gently says, "if thou knewest." It was the blind spot in her soul which was ruining her life. It was not her ignorance, mark you, of the wrappings of spiritual things, which wrought the mischief, but her blindness to the great spiritual verities and realities. She was not altogether illiterate. She had a knowledge of the Scriptures. She was well versed in her Samaritan creed. She understood the points of difference between that and the creed of the Jews. She was keen for controversy upon these points. But she knew not the substance and soul of truth. She knew not "the gift of God." In these particulars she represents multitudes of men and women in our own time. There are men who write books—books which manifest great mental breadth and acuteness, books which deal with biblical and theological subjects in a scholarly way, but which reveal, all too clearly, a lack of experimental knowledge of divine things. This is

the frequent difficulty which the Christian worker meets: acquaintance with the husk, but ignorance of the kernel of spiritual things. There is, for instance, no lack of intelligence among the English populace to-day regarding creeds and rituals and other trappings of that sort. The average British workman is a rather clever controversialist upon points like these. He is ready for argument. He can pick holes in speech or sermon with surprising facility. But does he know the power of God in his own soul? In many instances he does, we are thankful to believe. And then he stands out and lives a radiant life. But it is as true of the multitude of the common people, as it is of the lesser company of the scribes, that they are largely lacking in a first-hand, experimental knowledge of the things of God. What we need, above all other things, to know, are the things of which Jesus spoke to the woman at the well: the Gift of God, and the Bringer of the Gift.

1.

Concerning the Gift.

Christ's teaching upon this matter is all compacted into one word—"Life." "The gift of God is eternal life." The figure of

speech which Christ used to set forth His thought was singularly impressive. "Thou wouldest have asked of Him and He would have given thee living water." Water is essential to life. The thirst for it is the most intense of all our physical cravings. Jesus would have this Samaritan woman realise that what she most needed was something that would do for her soul what the water of Jacob's well could do, in partial measure, for her body. Every day this unfortunate woman was compelled to trudge out a mile and a half from the city in all weathers to bring the water from the well. Her own words show that it was an added hardship in an otherwise hard life. There is a plaintive note in her phrase, "all the way hither to draw." And yet she had trudged a long and weary way during the journey of her life and had sunk her pitcher into many a well without getting so much as one life-giving draught for her immortal soul. They were all poor wells and badly polluted. At this period of her life she was living in adultery. Every day the poison of that sinful alliance was doing its deadly work in her soul. Jesus would teach her that the blessing which God held in His gift was one that would issue in an artesian well within her

soul. The contents of that well, replenished continually from the fountain-head of life, would be satisfying, curative, and unfailing. She would no longer need to go hither and thither to draw, but would have the springs of life within. And this was the gift that Jesus was constantly holding forth to men —life for the soul, life in the soul.

2

But she needed to know also concerning the Bringer of the Gift.

Where was He to be found? She did not suspect that this wayworn traveller could bestow the gift. It was not for such as He to pour this blessing into her soul. When He asserted His power to confer the boon she met His claim with contemptuous scepticism. "Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with and the well is deep. From whence, then, hast Thou that living water?" She had yet to learn that Jesus was Himself both well and drawer of the living water. The well was His own deep, divine life; the apparatus for drawing was His own spirit of willing helpfulness. Truly the well was deep—deep as the nature of God, deep as the depths of human need. But He had something to draw with. He

had sympathy and understanding. Understanding was the line and sympathy the bucket which would bring up the crystal, vitalising waters from the nether springs of that deep well. He could lift the blessing for her in a moment and pour it fresh and cool into her parched and barren soul.

3.

Mark the Method which Christ employed to open her Soul for the Reception of the Gift!

First of all, *He appealed to her Sympathies.* His request, "Give Me to drink," touched her womanly instinct of mercy. There is in every woman a potential angel of ministration. It may be a sleeping angel; its wings may be folded or even broken. But the angel may be waked and its broken wings be mended if touched by a skilful hand. It is the prerogative of womanhood to relieve the distress and refresh the weariness of mankind. The appeal to woman's sympathy is one that seldom fails. And sympathy is a faculty of spiritual knowledge. It is an organ of vision. Get the sympathies aroused and you have prepared the way for a revelation. It was not a gracious response which the

woman first made to Christ's request, but the request had touched her and set the chords of her better nature in vibration.

Then He proceeded to awake her Wonder. Capacity to wonder is not a distinctively feminine characteristic, but it is stronger in women than in men. They have more imagination than men, and imagination impels to wonder. When, therefore, the Master said, "If thou knewest," He awoke within her a thirst to have the mystery of His words explained. She will not rest now until she gets the clue to this riddle. So she plunges into the matter with question and challenge concerning Himself. "Art Thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" This is progress towards the end He has in view. Presently she is saying, "Sir, give me this water that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw." This is further progress. He begins by making request of her; she is now making request of Him. He is getting on with His work.

Next He stirs her Conscience. "Go call thy husband." And now the tell-tale flush mantles her cheek and her head is drooping with shame as she replies, "I have no husband." It was true, but it was only

part of the truth, and not the worst part. She would fain leave the rest of it untold. She would huddle it up and hide it from this pure gaze. But that would be fatal to any cleansing or healing work. It would prevent the water of life from welling up into her soul. That hidden sin must be bored through and the love of it broken in her heart. It is only through a spirit opened up to God in repentance and confession that the water of life can rise. So the Master drives the steel drill of accusation clean down through her soul, unsparingly pressing upon her the facts of her shameful life. That is the only way to bring a sinner to the experimental knowledge of the gift of God. It is the only way to get the water of life into the soul. If you seek to hide your sin under some dishonest half-truth, or to dismiss it with some easy phrase, you will dam back the water of life. You must make a clean breast of it. You must let Christ bore down through all the rock formation of your heart. He must drive the shaft of His truth clear through your inmost, secret soul. Where that shaft goes through the water of life will presently come streaming in.

Now He inspires her Hope. Already she

perceives that He is a prophet. The lofty doctrine which He next communicates concerning God and the convincing word He speaks concerning worship set her whole being quivering with the hope that this may prove to be the promised One. Will the Messiah when He comes have sweeter or more vital truth to give? The half-formed hope trembles into timid expression: "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ; when He is come He will declare unto us all things." It was in reality a wistful question. "May I dare to hope that Thou art He?" All the passionate earnestness of her being goes into the words and she is looking steadfastly into His face. She stands upon the very verge of a new life.

Christ's concluding word wins her Faith. "I that speak unto thee am He." It was enough. Her whole being responded to the announcement which to her quickened spirit was a glorious revelation. In an instant she felt within her soul the upspringing waters of everlasting life. Where the shaft of conviction had been driven through the stream of grace came pouring in. In that moment she knew the gift of God and the bringer of the gift.

CHRIST ON THE MOUNT OF BEATITUDES

"Every one therefore which heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man which built his house upon the rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock. And every one that heareth these words of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof."—MATTHEW vii. 24–27.

CHAPTER IX

CHRIST ON THE MOUNT OF BEATITUDES

THESE words, forming the practical conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount, indicate the supreme place which Jesus gave in His teaching to the importance of character-building. Following out the metaphor which the Master used, we come upon three momentous facts.

1.

Characters, like Buildings, have a certain Unity about Them.

In the construction of a building a variety of materials may be used—stone, brick, iron, wood, glass, mortar, putty. But these materials are all, by the builder's work, incorporated into a structural unity. As component parts of the one building no bit of stuff can disown its relations to any other bit of stuff. They belong to each

other. Through the instrumentality of trowel, chisel, and hammer, they have been joined together and made members one of another. Diverse and unrelated as they were when first assembled on the site, these materials are now welded together in one consolidated mass.

A building may also include a multitude and variety of compartments. If you visit the town hall of Leicester, for instance, you will find a building of this sort. The room in which the Mayor and Councillors meet to deliberate upon civic affairs, is, as it should be, a well-appointed room, delightfully upholstered and beautifully decorated. Fine paintings hang on the walls. Light, mellowed by its passage through stained-glass windows streams in abundantly. It is an inviting place. But all the rooms in the building are not like that one. If you descend to the basement you will find quite another sort. Here the rooms are narrow and cheerless, with bare walls, cold stone floors, plain benches, and iron doors with padlocks on them. These rooms serve a different purpose from the one above. They are occupied by a less orderly set of people. Men and women are seen here in sorry plight. But all these rooms belong to the

one building. They are all parts of one inclusive scheme. The council-chamber cannot disown the prisoner's cell. Diverse as they are in the accommodation which they afford and the standing which they give their occupants before the community, they belong to each other in the unity of one scheme of civic administration.

The same principle holds true of your life. That, too, is a unity. All the materials which go into your life, all thoughts, emotions, purposes, deeds, are unified in character. You are, at this moment, the sum total of all that you have been. All the good in you is joined to all the bad in you. The best that is in you cannot disown the worst that is in you. All your personal characteristics are builded together in you, each to each. You cannot dissever them. You cannot dismember your soul. You are not a lumber-yard where materials displace each other as they are carted in and out; you are a structure. From the stuff at hand you select and build. No bit of mental or moral stuff in you can disclaim its relations to any other bit.

There are different compartments to your being. You have your council-chamber of the soul, where reason and

conscience deliberate and legislate for the general welfare of your life. But you have also the dark cells where unholy desires lurk and lawless passions rage. You may not conduct visitors to these cells. You may try to hide them. You may even deny their existence. But they are there and you know it. And they are part of you. They are all incorporated into the unity of your personality. Quality to quality, strength to weakness, good to evil, glory to shame, thus your life is interlinked and builded. Thought joins itself to thought, deed to deed, day to day, youth to manhood, manhood to age in the consolidated oneness of character. As De Quincey wrote, "Man is doubtless one by some subtle nexus extending from the new-born infant to the superannuated dotard."

Now this is a serious fact and one which makes the problem of living critical at every point. Especially does it emphasise the necessity of carefully selecting the stuff which is to be builded into character. Cheap and poor materials will make your life unsightly and unstable. Your moral intelligence must act as the watchful inspector to condemn and reject whatever falls below a high standard of quality.

Half-truths, however brilliant they may be; vulgar or selfish maxims, however clever they may seem; compromises with righteousness, however convenient they may appear; none of these are good enough to be builded into character. If you are too trivial or too lazy to take pains in this matter you will presently find yourself with a rookery instead of a substantial building on your hands.

The only perfect material for character-building is that supplied by the Divine architect in the Sermon on the Mount. Here in the Beatitudes you will find a pile of shining marble blocks, fresh-quarried from the mine of infinite wisdom. In the precepts of the sermon regarding your relations to God, to your fellow-men, to the moral law and to the events of Providence, you may find the plans and specifications for building these together into symmetry. If you really want the best of building stuff you must get it here.

You are to remember also that bad workmanship even upon good material will mar your structure. Carrara marble calls for careful treatment no less than sun-baked bricks. The Benedictine monks who built the Peterborough Cathedral used good stone but poor mortar. They seemed to

think that anything was good enough to shovel in between the courses. It was an expensive mistake. Many thousands of pounds have been required of late years to restore the fabric of that structure. If on any side of your life you build badly, whether it be on the side of your private life or your public life, your business life or your social life, to that extent your character is disfigured. On whatever storey you are at work, whether you are forming physical habits or mental habits or moral habits, you imperil the symmetry and strength of your life if you treat the materials in slip-shod fashion. We try to excuse ourselves for the cracks which appear in our characters, but the matter is too serious to be lightly dismissed. Weakness in one section may compromise the solidity of the whole. Ugliness from one point of view mars the entire artistic effect. Unwholesomeness in one part may speedily be communicated to every other part. If the tower is to stand straight there must be no sagging of the walls. If the council-chamber is to be protected from contagion the cells must be daily disinfected.

Of course, some parts of the building you are erecting are of more importance than some other parts. It is more necessary that

you have good morals than good manners. But good manners are by no means to be despised. To a certain extent, manners are the expression of morals. And your wife must marry both your manners and your morals. She will have to live with them both. If you are honest but ill-tempered and boorish she will grow old before her time. If you are corrupt in morals it will be poor satisfaction to her that you have a sunny temper and a taking way. It is the man well-builded in every department of his being who makes the sort of husband that a good woman desires and the sort of father that the children need. That is the sort of man the world needs everywhere. It is the sort of man Christ came to make.

2.

Characters, like Buildings, are Designed to serve Definite Uses.

The use to which the building is to be devoted will largely determine the plan of the architect. If it is a barn or a shop or a warehouse that one has in mind, he will adapt his architecture to the end in view. Men do not build spires on cattle-sheds or put rose-windows in bake-shops. And so it is in building character. The end to be

served will determine the style of construction. If your chief aim is to gather wealth you will govern yourself accordingly. Character enough to do business with will be all that you require. Accepting the doctrine that a man's life consists in the abundance of the things which he possesses, you will build your life after the style of a warehouse or a cold storage plant. You will consider it a waste of time to cultivate other than the commercial side of your life. You will pay little heed to general culture or to the claims of philanthropy and religion.

If the chief end of your life is pleasure, you will construct your character after the fashion of a playhouse. You will want plenty of colour and tinsel in it. You will aim to follow all the latest fashions, indulge in all the sports, participate in all amusements, and get in with the liveliest sets of people. But you will not think it worth while to work hard, or to interest yourself in public affairs. You will not care about meeting poor and unfortunate people. Perhaps you will not care to marry. Wife and children might stand in the way of your pleasures. You will not burden yourself with the support of aged parents.

If your chief aim in life is to acquire

knowledge, you will build after the library plan. All you will need is book-space in your brain. Nothing more effectually isolates a man, setting him apart in cob-webbed uselessness, than the selfish pursuit of knowledge. He gathers information, stores it in the garret of his brain, and the rats eat it.

If, again, your chief aim is the winning of high place and fame, you will build after the pattern of an Eiffel Tower. Steps to climb by will be all you need. Nor will you be over-careful concerning the stuff for step-building which you use. If you can make a step of your neighbour and climb up over him, you will probably be quite willing to utilise him in that capacity.

But suppose, now, you make it your chief care to do good in the world and help your fellow-creatures. You will need, now, to build your life after a far nobler plan than any which I have named. You will need to plan for a type of character that will possess the essential features of a home. If you are to help people in the largest way, they must be able to live in you. Little children must live in your cheerful kindness; your family must live in your love; the poor, the ignorant,

the unfortunate, the discouraged, must live in your sympathy; friends must live in your appreciation and loyalty. Room must be made for all of these. You should not expect to be a great helper of humanity if you build your life on a low and narrow plan. There must be spaciousness about it to afford the required accommodation. There must be a reception-room in your sympathy, a banqueting-room in your affection, a consulting-room in your understanding, a bathroom in your assoiling moral earnestness. There must be rest-rooms in you too, quiet chambers where peace reigns and where the atmosphere is fresh and sweet. You must be a man built on a broad and high plan if others are to find a home in you. You must be a man of insight, of imagination, of generosity; you must be a man of tranquillity and heart-purity. Possessing these qualities your life will be for other lives an attractive, sheltering, sustaining home.

But now suppose you have accepted the highest of all ends as your aim in life, namely, to do the will of God. This end will include all other worthy ends. It will not alienate you from the service of man, but will complete and crown that service. You must remember, however, that to reach

this end demands a still loftier plan of building. You must build now after the plan of a temple. You must make room for God. You must have a sanctuary in you. There must be a shrine in your heart. In the deepest centre of your life you must build an oratory. And it must be kept inviolate. To reach this end you must be a religious man. You must be a Christian. You must take your plan from Jesus Christ, the architect and exemplar of the perfect life.

Do not forget that you are to live in the spiritual structure you build, and continue to live in it while immortality endures. See that it is fit to be the enduring habitation of your conscience!

3.

Characters, like Buildings, are Subjected to many and severe Testings.

Each day is a test-day for all the buildings of the town. The weather tests them, the sunshine and the frost and the rain. Use tests them. Strain and weight of contents test them. The shock of traffic tests them. Sometimes fire and flood test them. The same is true of character. For it every day is a judgment day. Joy tests

it, and sorrow tests it. Some characters crumble beneath the one, some beneath the other. Work tests and leisure tests. The joys and sorrows of others, their successes and failures—these test it too. The fire of temptation and the flood of tribulation are the severer methods of testing to which it is subjected in the great crises of experience.

And because character is to be so severely tested, it becomes a matter of supreme concern that it be built upon the true foundation. In setting forth this great necessity, the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount comes to its climax of warning and of self-assertion. Character built on a sandy foundation will ultimately collapse into hideous ruin. And all character not foundationed upon Jesus Christ *is* built upon the sand. Such is the plain teaching of the Christ. And what a tremendous assertion it is! Think of one individual claiming to be the upholder of all human security and the sustaining base of all human well-being! Men in Christian pulpits are declaring to-day that Jesus never claimed deity for Himself in any other sense than that in which you and I may claim it. If that were so, if Jesus did not regard Himself as being divine in a sense abso-

lutely unique and unattainable by any other human being, then in making such a claim as this His arrogance was outrageous. For, you will notice, He pre-empts to Himself the whole foundation area. He leaves no room for any other teacher to share that office with Him. Whatever men may say regarding Him to-day, it is clear that He believed Himself to be infinitely superior to any man who had ever lived or ever should live, in spiritual power and authority. The distinction which He here draws between Himself and all other men is wide enough to stand for the distinction between man and God.

The experience of the ages justifies Christ's claim. A great host of people who have tried many another foundation are singing to-day:—

> "On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
> All other ground is sinking sand."

Yes, the one solid foundation for human character has been abundantly proven to be the Lord Jesus Christ, His Person, His Word, His Work, His Grace.

They are anxious now about St. Paul's Cathedral. Parts of the foundation have

shown signs of weakness, and grave concern is felt for the safety of the structure. It would be a national calamity if serious harm should come to that noble pile which lifts above the smoke of London "the finest dome in Christendom." But it is an infinitely greater calamity when a man created in the image of God and redeemed by the blood of Christ crumbles into everlasting ruin. "Take heed, therefore, how ye build."

CHRIST BY THE SEA OF GALILEE

"On that day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside. And there were gathered unto Him great multitudes, so that he entered into a boat and sat; and all the multitude stood on the beach. And he spake to them many things in parables, saying, Behold the sower went forth to sow."—MATTHEW xiii. 1–3.

CHAPTER X

CHRIST BY THE SEA OF GALILEE

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

WE shall best think of the sower in this parable as being Christ Himself. From this viewpoint the parable is a revelation of the spirit and method of Christ's work for men.

1.

In the Sower's handling of the Seed we have a Picture of Christ's Cheerful Expenditure of Efforts for the Enrichment of the World.

The sower goes about his work in a large and open-handed way. He deals generously by the soil. He is not miserly with his seed. He scatters it with a free hand. He knows that to sow sparingly is to reap slenderly. If he stints the soil of

seed he will cheat himself out of a harvest. He is moved to liberality by an optimistic faith. Slinging the seed-bag over his shoulder he strides across the fields and empties it with a cheerful prodigality. Foolish people, ignorant of the miracle of harvest, might accuse him of wastefulness. Greedy and impatient men might think that the seed had better be eaten at once and not flung upon the land like this. But the sower understands his business. He knows full well that some of his seeds will be wasted. They will fall upon the roadway at the edge of the field and the birds will pick them up. But he deems it better that a bit of beaten path be sown than that a margin of ploughed soil be left unseeded. He would rather overdo his sowing than underdo it. That is why he flings some seeds into the thorn-bushes. The edge of the good soil runs right up to the thorn-tangle, and in his eagerness to get the last inch of productive land under crop he is willing that a few seeds should overshoot the mark. So he gives a wide, strong swing to his arm, and grudges not the drain upon his bag of seed. He believes that the harvest will justify the outlay.

And thus it was with our Lord. He took His way through life scattering energies, distributing efforts, and broadcasting truths with a generous hand. Broadly, even lavishly, He sowed the precious seeds of wisdom and of love. One day He noticed that a large proportion of what He had done seemed to have come to nothing. It looked as though His energies had been wasted and His efforts thrown away. The field which He had sown so thickly still wore a bare and unpromising look. Only one corner of the field gave hope of harvest. But that corner looked exceedingly well. It gave promise of yielding an hundred-fold. And it fulfilled the promise. That little company of disciples who remained with Him when the multitude went away brought in returns that filled the Sower's heart with joy. Through them came seed for other sowings and other harvests. This is always the spirit in which Christ does His work—the spirit of a boundless generosity, the spirit of a radiant optimism. And this is the only spirit which becomes His followers. We must believe in the vitality and potency of goodness and the certainty of the harvest from its sowing in the lives of men. If we are more

concerned to keep a full seed-bin than to have growing crops we are not of His spirit. It is for us to do the scattering of the seed, trusting Him to give the increase. Nothing is more absurd than a grudging spirit in the sower of good seed. All the harvests of reform which the world has witnessed have been due to the cheerful prodigality of hopeful sowers. They could never have been produced by men who stingily counted the seeds in their hands. When Wendall Phillips was asked what could arouse the country to the emancipation of the slaves he answered, "Sow the country knee-deep with abolition literature!" The men of this world are wise enough in their own generation to know the relation between seed-sowing and harvest. Every election-time the land is sown thick with campaign literature. The Suffragets of England are fairly bombarding the country with their publications to-day. The Socialists are at it too, and the Prohibitionists. It is the policy of wisdom. No man is true to his conviction, whatever it may be, who is not willing to spend a good deal for seed to make it grow in other lives.

2.

The Sower's waiting for the Harvest pictures the Master's Patience in dealing with Men.

No sower treading the furrows with his seed-bag in the morning expects to be binding sheaves before the sun goes down. The time element must come in. The days must bring their quivering heat and the nights their cooling dews. God works along the lines of an ordered progressiveness in gardens and in men. "As the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations." But neither of these growths is produced in a day. Each must have its growing season. Nature does not spring from snowbanks to rose-beds at a single bound. Even in lands where the succession of the seasons is most clearly marked no one can tell precisely the hour when winter ends and spring begins. More than once have I seen spring at the front while winter lingered still at the rear of my Canadian home. The lawn with the southern ex-

posure was already bright with greening grass while the brown earth at the back lay shivering under pools of snow-water. And I have found a similar condition in my soul. That, too, has its southern exposure where the light of God falls warm and bright. There some little growths appear to show that spring has come. But it has also its shadowed places over which "the winds from unsunned spaces blow," and where the frosts still linger. These inner areas of shadow and of chill seem sometimes to mock my hope. And yet, as surely as I know in later March, that the whole Continent is moving towards the springtime and the harvest, so surely do I know that my whole being is moving towards a fairer and more fruitful time. We need not be discouraged when the spiritual growth is slow. Sin binds the soul in stronger chains than ice-bands bind the earth. But these bands are to be broken one by one. From seed to bud, from bud to flower and fruit; that is God's order. In the realm of spiritual graces, righteousness is the bud, praise the incense from the full-blown flower. In God's good time it shall be perfected.

Jesus was a patient waiter for the harvest. It was a great joy to Him when

a wondrously quick growth gave Him the early Samaritan ingathering. But it did not spoil Him for patient waiting upon other seed which He had sown and which was long in coming to its harvest-time. The disciples were often impatient. They would have Him force the hands of the clock around to make it strike the hour of triumph-song. But He waited for the seconds to tick out the minutes and the minutes to make up the hours. In their impatient moments He would tell them of the "Afterwards" in which their own understanding of spiritual things would ripen and in which His kingdom should come to manifestation in the world.

Prophets, patriots, and reformers still find it tiresome waiting for the harvest. Reforms come with exasperating slowness. In England the power of the liquor traffic has not yet been broken. The slum is persistent. At one end of the social system we have vast and ever-increasing wealth, while at the other end we see infinite poverty and wretchedness. Opium still curses China, and a procrustean system of caste still maims and tortures India. Russia is choked black by the hand of political tyranny, while Germany is hard-ridden by militarism. America is led handcuffed by

the trusts. The golden age long promised seems far away. Not half the population of the world is as yet even nominally Christian. It is scarcely to be wondered at that pessimists and unbelievers flout the Church and pronounce Christianity a failure. But Christ's disciples should not lose heart. Measuring forward to the ideal state of things, we have still a long way to travel. But measuring back to the conditions in ancient Rome and Antioch and Babylon, we can see that we have come a long way through the wilderness. It is the principle of the harvest that must steady us in our working and our waiting. The very discontent with imperfect conditions, so active in our time, is a sign that the good seed is stirring in the soil. If the soil were lying fallow, we should not witness the reformatory movements of the day. The seed is growing, but we cannot force the growth over wide areas. It has many difficulties of soil to contend with. It has to deal with the shallowness of human minds and the perversity of human wills. You cannot cleanse East London as you would drain a bog. In the one case you may dig your trenches, put in your piping, and have an end of it. But you must consult

the slums before you can abolish them. You must grow in them new crops of ideas, new attitudes towards life. It takes generations to do that. "Behold, the sower went forth to sow."

3.

The Growth of the Seed in the Soil pictures for us the Noiseless Working of Christ's Life in the Souls of Men.

Seeds do not explode in the soil. We never hear a bud burst. We are not wakened in the morning by any tumult of blossoming roses. Yet the force which unfolds the rose and opens the heart of the lily is the same as that which split Mont Pelee and burst Vesuvius and laid the cities of San Francisco and Kingston in ruins. Force may be boisterous when it works destructively, but when it works constructively it is mainly silent. Occasionally in a forest one is startled by the sudden crash of some gigantic tree that falls shrieking to its death. But forest-building is silent work. It proceeds without disturbing the slumbers of the lightest sleepers of the woods. It startles neither bird in nest nor beast in lair. The mighty work by which the royal oaks and lordly

pines are lifted towards the skies is done in stillness unbroken and profound.

The vital process is not different in the realm of grace. It is true that religious conversions are frequently attended by violent emotional disturbances. In his "Varieties of Religious Experiences," Professor James has a chapter on conversion which records remarkable instances of this sort. One tells of his conversion in this way: "Every time I would call on God, something like a man's hand would strangle me by choking. . . . As often as I would pray, that unseen hand was felt on my throat, and my breath squeezed off. Finally something said: "Venture on the Atonement, for you will die anyway if you don't." So I made one final struggle to call on God for mercy, with the same choking and strangling, determined to finish the sentence of prayer for mercy, if I did strangle and die, and the last I remember that time was falling back on the ground with the same unseen hand on my throat. I don't know how long I lay there or what was going on. When I came to myself there was a crowd around me praising God. The very heavens seemed to open and pour down rays of light and glory. Not for a moment

only, but all day and night, floods of light and glory seemed to pour through my soul, and oh, how I was changed! and everything became new." Instances like this have interest for the psychologist, but they have practically no evangelical significance. The fact remains that the seed of the kingdom works quietly in the soul. In each of the cases recorded by Professor James it is to be noted that when the word of the gospel became established in the soul it produced tranquillity. Preparatory influences create disturbance. To clear the soil of "choking" thorns requires vigorous hacking at the bushes and mighty pulling at the roots. It takes loud blasting to shatter the rock. But these operations are for the opening of the soil to the seed. Once the seed is in it works in silence. Demons may tear a man and come forth from him with loud cries; but the Holy Spirit enters with calm, sweet peace. There may be tumult raised by squawking birds of prey that peck the soul and fight each other in efforts to steal the seed; but when the seed is covered in the ground the tumult ceases. The norm of spiritual growth is to be found in the religious experiences of children reared in Christian

homes. In the child-soul the reign of the Spirit announces itself as silently as the dawn and as sweetly as the blushing of a rose. Beyond the period of childhood we have to deal with the clearing of the soil before we can get to the sowing of the seed.

4.

The Sower of the Seed is also the Tiller of the Soil.

One charm of agriculture consists in the transformations which may be wrought upon the face of nature. A field is not a fixity. It is susceptible of culture. There is a field beneath the field to be reached and reaped. Nor is a human life a fixed thing, but something that can be made over and over by the Master's hand into ever-increasing richness and potency. The unproductive soils of which Christ spoke were not always to remain unproductive. He has spades for the hard-trodden wayside places in our hearts. He has sharp and piercing instruments to break up the crusts which form upon our souls. See how He has broken through the prejudices of men and nations! The Roman Empire was all encrusted with prejudices antago-

nistic to the gospel, but Christ worked His way in. The crust of India and of China is being broken up to-day. Christ has also drills and dynamite for the blasting of the ledges of rock which oppose the progress of His kingdom. This is not the devil's world; it is Christ's world. Convulsions which startle and confuse one generation are seen by the next to be the strange work of the Lord and to result in open doors for the entrance of the gospel. And Christ can uproot the thorns however tenaciously they grip the soul. The Cross, once it pierces the soul, gets such leverage on the roots of care and worldliness that it extracts them to their finest tips.

Christ has vast harvests to reap from the yet unproductive portions of the great world-field. In every nation He is ploughing furrows from which the angels shall bind bright sheaves.

CHRIST BY THE SEA OF GALILEE

(*Continued*)

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field: the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls: who, when he hath found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."—MATTHEW xiii. 44–46.

CHAPTER XI

CHRIST BY THE SEA OF GALILEE (*continued*)

THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEERLESS PEARL

1.

These Parables suggest that in Writing our Invoice of Life we should give due Heed to the Matter of Comparative Values.

The treasure and the pearl both represent concentrated wealth. The hidden treasure was worth more than the field in which it was found. The pearl exceeded in value the entire collection of jewels which the merchantman had previously made. If, as some have thought, the active personality in these parables is the Lord Jesus Christ, then the treasure and the pearl is man. The estimate of man's value set forth by the parables, in this interpretation of them, harmonizes

completely with the value which Christ, elsewhere in His teachings, puts upon him. He tells us that He laid aside the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, in order that He might come to earth to seek and to save that which was lost. He teaches us that it is more profitable to save a human soul than to gain the whole world. To win this treasure He gave His life as a ransom. We have been redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver or gold, but with His own precious blood. The crown-jewels of heaven, in all their massed magnificence, would look poor and mean beside the treasure which He poured out upon the hard counter of Calvary for the purchase of the pearl of mankind's love-loyalty. Among all the broad fields of the universe there was none which He so coveted as the one in which the precious spiritual possibilities of man lay buried. No world held any pearl which so fascinated Him as that pearl which He saw gleaming in the hand of the black prince of this world. Nowhere has man as man been estimated at so high a value as in the gospel of Christ. When Christ came into the world, scarcely anything was held so cheaply as man. When the slave-markets were glutted the

price of a man would often fall below that of a sheep. Warriors and emperors, philosophers and priests had entered into an unholy conspiracy to write man's value down. Christ wrote it up; nor, since His day, has it ever touched so low a point as that at which He found it.

The other interpretation of these parables, and the one which best accords with their structure, makes man the quester and Christ, in the richness of His grace, the treasure and the pearl. Vast as man's value to the kingdom of heaven may be, the value of the kingdom to man must be greater still. On Christ's head are "many crowns." Had mankind been lost forever from the fellowship of God, the loss to deity, we must believe, would have been enormous. Otherwise we cannot explain the lavish expenditure which has been made for our recovery. Yet heaven would still have been a world of glory. God and His Christ would have continued rich beyond our imaginings in their fellowship with each other and with unfallen, created spirits. But man would have been beggared to all eternity. The loss to him would have been utterly ruinous. To add the kingdom of heaven to the spiritual possessions of man, which is done through

union with Christ, is to redeem his soul from destruction and to crown him with glory and honour. The kingdom of heaven means more for man's enrichment of life than to endow him with all the worlds in space. For it adds to him the world of truth, the world of holiness, the world of love, the world of beauty, and the world of peace. He who seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, finds that all other things of real and lasting value are added unto him. The values of the kingdom of grace constitute the superlative dowry of the human soul. Possessing these, the soul is "rich towards God." Lacking the wealth which grace bestows, we are victims of a pitiable impoverishment: "Wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." In the administration of our life we should give due heed to the matter of comparative values.

2.

The Parables suggest that the Wealth of the Kingdom of Heaven awaits us in Forms immediately applicable to our Life-needs.

When Jesus spoke of "treasure hid in a field," He was thinking of a secreted pot of money. It was gold coin, probably,

that the ploughman found. It was a common custom for men in the East to convert their wealth into gold and bury it. Opportunities for profitable investment were comparatively rare in those days. And wealth exposed to view attracted the cupidity of rapacious rulers and extortionate tax-gatherers. Moreover, the insecurity of property, due to frequent wars and the roving of predatory bands, added a further inducement for men of wealth to secret their possessions. When, therefore, the ploughman came upon a box of buried treasure, he had at hand a form of wealth upon which he could immediately realise in the markets of the world.

An equally convenient form in which to concentrate values was to purchase jewels. These, also, were easily negotiable. To this day many Jews carry a large proportion of their wealth in precious stones. The memory of centuries of persecution, spoliation, and banishments, prompts them to hold their riches in readily transportable forms.

Among all the jewels of the world the most perfect emblem of Christ's grace is the pearl. When it comes to the hand of man the pearl is already a finished

product. No work of man can enhance its value. It is not like that with the diamond. The value of the diamond is vastly heightened by manipulation. It is mined in a crude state and needs to be cut and ground. Before its sleeping splendours can be wakened, it must go upon the lapidary's wheel. The facets which break the sunlight into rippling iridescence represent a superadded grace of human handiwork. But upon the pearl no man lifts up a graving-tool. Fresh-plucked from its shell, it is already a perfect thing. It has been antecedently wrought into consummate worth and beauty, in dim, green depths of ocean. Divine grace, like the pearl, needs not to be manipulated but appropriated. It is bestowed upon us in a finished state. It was wrought into superlative completeness in the oceanic depths of God's holy love. The sinner who accepts it by simple faith is instantaneously possessed of the potentialities of the kingdom of heaven. He kneels a pauper, he stands up a prince. Or, reverting to the former parable, we may say that the gold wherewith Christ dowers the soul is minted gold. Any attempt to raise the value of this currency by mixing it with merit of our own is an impertinence. It

degrades the coin of the heavenly realm. The finished work of Christ is the perfect medium for the procurement of every spiritual blessing. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

3.

These Parables suggest the Impartialness of the Kingdom of Heaven and of that Grace by which it is Attained.

The gifts of the kingdom are bestowed without respect of persons. The pearl-merchant of the parable may be taken to represent the habitual and absorbed truth-seeker. He stands for the students and scholars of the world. The poet, the philosopher, the scientist, the historian—these are all devoted questers after pearls. The ploughman represents the common people, the great mass of men and women who are tied to a monotonous round of humdrum duties, and have little or no leisure or inclination to investigate subjects which lie apart from the problem of daily bread. But the ploughman and the merchant are equally fortunate in the matter of the kingdom. The people who occupy themselves with drudging, un-

romantic tasks are as surely in the way of salvation as poets and philosophers. The whole history of Christianity goes to prove that God puts this treasure in the way of simple and lowly souls no less frequently than in the path of the gifted and the learned. Nicodemus has no advantage over the woman of Samaria. He was a pearl-seeker; she a slave, treading the dry furrow of a hopeless life. A blazing star in the heavens guided wise men from the East to the house where the young child, Jesus, lay; but a choir of angels announced the glad tidings to the Judean shepherds, who took precedence of the Magi in opportunity and honour. At your very feet, and in the line of dusty duty, you may find God's all-enriching grace.

4.

These Parables unite in Accentuating the Fact that the Kingdom of Heaven may come to Men as the Result of a Sudden and Joyful Discovery.

The ploughman was looking for some enrichment from his toil, but not for the great good fortune which so suddenly came to him. He was working for wages,

expecting no more than the "penny" from his employer when the day was done. He was not seeking treasure-trove, he was preparing the soil for a crop of beans. When the point of the ploughshare struck the hidden treasure chest an ugly jolt passed through his frame. He was ready to curse the obstruction which had hindered his work and dulled the point of his ploughshare. So do we often revolt against the hard experiences of life, not dreaming that they enclose a golden treasure. But when the ploughman stooped to lift the obstruction from the furrow, lo, a fortune lay disclosed before his astonished gaze.

The pearl-merchant, too, experienced a genuine surprise when he first sighted that queen of pearls. Perhaps he came upon it, awaiting a purchaser in some little bazaar; or, he may have seen it flashing in the hand of the diver, fresh from the sea. In either case it was a discovery. He had purchased many a pearl, but never one so large and lustrous as this. A very intoxication of gladness accompanied the discovery. The parable, in this suggestion, is not overdrawn. Pliny tells us that Cleopatra possessed two pearls, each of which was valued at

what would represent a fortune in our money.

And it is often thus that we become aware of the treasure hid in Christ. There is a sudden enthralment of the soul by the glory of the gospel. In many instances the realising sense of infinite grace breaks upon the consciousness in instantaneous illumination. There is a moment of insight, a flash of intuition, and all the life is transfigured. We should have no scepticism concerning the genuineness of sudden conversions.

For all the best things of life have a surprise power in them. Great paintings have it. The picture which has hung before your eyes for years, if it be a good picture, one day discloses a charm and suggests a meaning which you had not discerned before. The same thing is true of friendship. All our best friends astonish us with acts of devotion and self-sacrifice. Love is always treating us to glad surprises. The kingdom of love is an endless wonderland. It is ever bestowing some unexpected grace, flooding us with some unimagined glory. Guinevere had always recognised the splendid manhood of King Arthur. She knew him as a "great and gentle lord, who was,

as is the conscience of a saint among his warring senses, to his knights"; but she never suspected the depth and tenderness of his love, nor the boundlessness of his mercy, until he came to her "there in the holy house at Almesbury," to assure her of his pardon and to bid her meet him "before high God."

And what surprises meet us in the gospel! We plough the fields of Scripture in our daily readings and reap in varying harvests a resultant moral culture. We seek for intellectual enrichment amid its profusion of literary gems and are rewarded with many a precious pearl of thought. But one day, in our reading of the gospel, the cleaving-point of the mental plough is suddenly arrested by what proves to be a pot of buried gold. Where many a time before the plough had ridden lightly through the yielding loam, there is now a strong arrestment. Ploughing with a weight upon the soul, we come upon some hidden meaning with the shock and thrill of unexpected impact. We stoop, and in the furrow at our feet is disclosed a boundless treasure. In a sentence, we find the gate of the kingdom and all heaven lies within our grasp.

It was thus with St. Augustine. From

his youth he was an eager seeker of treasure. Yielding to the impulses of the flesh, he pursued delights that appealed to his artistic or sensuous nature, sought distractions in objects pleasing to the eye, in games, theatres, or music, or the indulgence of animal passion. Yet, tortured by the reproaches of conscience, he reaped no harvest of repose; he only gleaned self-loathing. In his quest for wisdom and truth he turned to the Manichees. For nine years he wandered amid the mazes of their speculations, his intellect subdued by their subtleties, his imagination charmed by their interpretations of nature. Here, again, he found no abiding peace. But one September day, in a retired corner of his garden in Milan, a light from heaven shone upon these words as he read them: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof." In that moment he gained the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of heaven won a distinguished citizen.

5.

These Parables illustrate for us the Nature and Action of Evangelical Faith.

Faith has in it the quality of decisiveness. The ploughman and the pearl-seeker both acted upon the discoveries which they made. In each case there was prompt and definite resolution. Desire and discovery needed to be supplemented by determination. And so it is with reference to spiritual treasure. The emotional experience of desire, followed by the intellectual experience of discovery, must issue in the volitional act of choice before the soul comes into actual possession of the heavenly grace. Faith is the intent of the heart plus the assent of the understanding plus the consent of the will. Not by dream or reverie, not by long waiting at the wishing-gate does the kingdom come. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force." Unless the discovery of opportunity beget in us the holy violence of a noble intensity, it will presently become to us but a tantalising memory of what might have been.

Faith has in it the quality of venture-

someness. It risks everything upon a single act. The ship of time glides swiftly past the treasure island which the soul descries. Faith leaps overboard, resolved to sink or swim to where the treasure lies. Men who sneer at religious faith as a weak and listless thing know not its essential characteristics. Faith is heroic. It is not "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought"; it is ruddy with resolution, superb in noble daring.

Faith has in it the spirit of sacrificialness. Ploughman and merchantman sold all that they had in order to possess the treasure and the pearl. There is always an altar in Faith's path. Sometimes there is a cross. All choosing involves refusing. In some form or other there is a renouncement coincident with welcoming. It may be a prejudice, or a habit, or a cloying companionship, or a besetting sin, that must be surrendered; but in any or all of these it is the knifing of self-will that marks the abandon of the soul to the recompensing goodness of the Lord.

Faith has in it a wise and splendid strategy. In every opportunity there is a strategic element to be reckoned with. Opportunity means, literally, "off a harbour." There is latent poetry in the

word. Yonder comes the scudding ship adown the rocky, stormswept coast, like a frightened sea-bird seeking haven. The wind is shrieking through the cordagé; the waves are boiling white with yeasty foam. The ship is creaking, straining, groaning, climbing, trembling, as she drives before the gale. The watch is at the look-out. Somewhere in this neighbourhood there is a gap in the sea-wall, through which the ship may thrust into safety. Presently the watchman descries the opening, where a ribbon of blue water points the way to peaceful anchorage in a land-locked bay. This is the moment of opportunity. The signal is given; the helm is thrust hard down; quivering like a living thing the ship comes up into the wind; then with a mighty plunge she takes the gap, threads it, and glides to anchor in the calm waters of the bay. To have missed the gap would have meant the irretrievable loss of opportunity.

The gospel of Christ sets before us an open door. It rings the harbour-bell inviting us to anchorage. Faith sees the opportunity and thrusts in to furl its sails in the heart of Immanuel's land.

CHRIST CONCERNING THINGS LOST

"And he spake unto them this parable, saying,
What man of you having an hundred sheep . . .
Or what woman having ten pieces of silver . . .
A certain man had two sons. . . ."

—Luke xv. 3, 4, 8, 11

CHAPTER XII

CHRIST CONCERNING THINGS LOST

"THIS parable"; not these parables. The window is one, though it has three panes. The clover is one, though it bears three leaves. God is one, though manifested in three persons. The parable is one, though divided into three parts.

From this great utterance of our Lord we learn His thought and feeling concerning that which is lost.

1.

The Parable suggests to us Three Ways of Getting Lost.

The soul may get lost as a sheep gets lost; that is, through Heedlessness. The sheep did not intend to go astray. It had no quarrel with the shepherd or

with the members of the flock. It was not bored by the tameness of its surroundings. It made no wild dash for liberty. It was through unheeding stupidity that it got lost. It did not give attention to its ways. It went on cropping the sweet grasses, tuft after tuft, taking no note of either shepherd or sheep. It was having a good time in its own way, and where it saw another mouthful of grass it went after that. When the shepherd called the sheep together to conduct them to the fold, this one was too far off to hear.

And this is part of the story of the way in which mankind has become lost in the wilderness of sin. "We all, like sheep, have gone astray." We find ourselves in a world of beauty and of pleasure and we give ourselves to the pursuit of happiness. There, before us, gleams another joy and we go after that. It seems quite natural and it all looks very innocent. In the days of our youth we feel that this is what life is for. And so we run with heedless step. We have no quarrel with God; we have no spite against humanity; we are not discontented with our lot. We simply follow our own will and way, careless of all else. It is not that young life consciously sets

its heart on wickedness or determines to get away from sight and sound of God; it is that young life does not consider. It acts from impulse and does not reflect upon consequences. It is like the sheep which unthinkingly nibbled the green until it became separated from the flock's companionship and the shepherd's care.

The soul may get lost as the coin got lost; that is, through Sluggishness.

The coin had no power of resistance in it. It was a lifeless thing; an inert mass. It was a victim of circumstances. It was the plaything of surrounding forces. While the woman had it she held it by main force. It was kept in place among other pieces of silver by means of a string. When the string broke, gravitation laid hold upon it and whirled it away. The coin simply went where it was carried and remained where it was left until some new force came and lifted it again.

And this opens to us another chapter in the story of lost souls. Multitudes of lives are ruined through lack of moral force. They seem to have no power of resistance in them. They are the creatures of circumstances, the sport of whatever power lays hold upon them. Not infre-

quently a flabby will accompanies a brilliant intellect. Many a man with mind as bright as polished silver is but a straw in power of self-determination. Our great concern for the youth of each generation is that they shall have sufficient strength of will to shape their course according to the dictates of the understanding. Half the trouble of the world is wrought because young men permit themselves to be overborne by the influence of bad companions, and young women yield to the blandishments of worthless suitors. The most precious things in life are lost through listlessness. If we could only learn the art of putting core and pith into the will we should go far to redeem the world from destruction.

The soul may get lost as the son got lost; that is through Willfulness.

In the case of the prodigal it was not a matter of weakness but of depravity. Foolishness and rascality were combined in him. A vast amount of sympathy has been expended upon him. Preachers have lionised him and made a hero of him. But the truth is, he was a bad son. He had no proper reverence or affection for his father. He had no regard for his brother. However inconvenient it might be to

convert his "portion of goods" into ready money, it counted not with him so long as he could finger the gold in his own purse. He was supremely selfish in all his movements; and he did not have sense enough to know when he was well off. He chafed against the decent restraints of home. He thought it would be a fine thing to have a fling in the big, free world. He was spoiling for a dash into Bohemia. He wanted to lose himself, and he succeeded too well.

No story of the world's lost state would be complete without this chapter. We may all wish to be apologists for humanity; but every misfortune cannot be traced either to thoughtlessness or weakness. There is such a thing as innate, downright lawlessness. Sin is something more than error; it is wilful rebellion against God. Nothing is to be gained by white-washing the ugly fact of human depravity. The whitewash peels off when rubbed against the facts of experience. When men tell me that in all my evil-doing I have been blindly groping after God and goodness, I know that they have not probed to the root of the matter. They are snap-diagnosticians. It may be very complimentary to me, but I know it is not true. I know

where and when I consciously turned my back to God and walked away to follow my own devices. Nor did I expect to find my Father in "the far country" towards which I set my steps. I was a fool, but not that sort of a fool. When the appeal is made to experience this doctrine of man as an inveterate quester after God turns out to be something less reliable than moonshine. Men deliberately go to the devil, knowing quite well where they are going. At least, some men do. They see the good and choose the evil. In many an instance it is not a case of missing the path but of rejecting it after it has been discovered. It is this fact which makes our sin so black. At the bottom of that doctrine which represents every fall of man as an upward stumbling into light, there is a latent scepticism of the power of grace to redeem a soul which has deliberately turned away from God. It is not only false to experience, but it robs the gospel of its brightest glory. Even the prodigal got home again and found his joy in his father's fellowship.

2.

This Parable reminds us of Three Consequences of Being Lost.

There is the consequence of Helpless Wretchedness. A lost sheep is a pitiable object. It is a witless creature. It seems well-nigh devoid of self-protecting instincts. It has no scent to find the path and no strength or skill to fight. It cannot swim in swift waters. It is not cunning to delude its enemies. It stumbles on rocky paths and is torn by arresting thorns. In its helpless misery it can only bleat and bleed. Its cries but add to its woes, increasing the danger from the prowling wolf.

The soul that has wandered away from God finds itself in similar plight. It was this which filled the heart of the Good Shepherd with compassion for the multitudes. "He saw them distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd." The experience of each generation of men goes to prove the helplessness of unshepherded souls. They have neither the power to protect themselves in the wilderness nor to find the way out. It is a curious fact that lost men travel in a circle. They seem to themselves to be going in

a straight line, but all the while they are veering round upon their own tracks. When they come upon these again they are hopelessly bewildered. So it is with mind and heart when life has lost its touch with God. The movements of the soul are circular then rather than onward. The author of Ecclesiastes noted this strange, dark fact. In his own estrangement from God he found his mind moving in imprisoning circles. He compared it to the sun that "ariseth and goeth down, and hasteth again to the place where he arose"; to the wind "that goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it turneth about continually in its course, and returneth again to its circuits"; to the rivers which are taken from the sea and return to it again. "All things are full of weariness; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which hath been is that which shall be; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun." Is not that a perfect picture of the fruitlessness of human effort to find the path of life apart from the direct leadership of God's Spirit? Every student of comparative religions must recognise the striking likeness. Through-

out the ages the human mind has revolved around the same old themes in much the same old ways. Even that which calls itself a "new" theology lacks in newness no less than in trueness. It is but a new masquerade of ideas which were old when Paul was penning his epistles. The essential principles of it were as clearly expounded in the ancient cities of India as they are in the London of to-day. "Christian Science" claims to be a new thing in the world, yet it is really nothing more than the re-vamping of the old shoes of Buddhism. "That which hath been is that which shall be." It is only the Good Shepherd who can extricate us from the maze. He leadeth in straight tracks. Nor is there any peace for the soul until He comes. India with all its metaphysical subtleties and its elaborate religious systems is pre-eminently the land of vast unrest, deep sadness, and trembling fear. But wherever a soul is lost from God, whether it stand beneath the shadow of a Christian cathedral or a pagan temple, it must taste the bitterness of helpless wretchedness.

The story of the piece of silver reminds us of another consequence of being lost: the Penalty of Uselessness.

Even when lost to its owner, and whilst lying in some dark and filthy corner, the coin retained its original, intrinsic value. It was still "a piece of silver." It still bore the stamp of royalty. But it was lost from its intended use. It has been suggested that the coin belonged to a necklace of silver, and that it may have been a wedding gift from her husband. This would invest it with a special sacredness in her eyes. But whether the woman valued it for its purchasing power or cherished it as a love-gift and a thing of beauty wherewith to adorn her person, this fact remains: it no longer served its purpose.

Valuable but useless! That seems a strange thing to affirm of a human life, does it not? Yet it may frequently be affirmed with truth. Value may remain after use has ceased. The value which Christ put upon lost souls is past all reckoning; yet He distinctly teaches that the soul estranged from God has ceased to perform the functions for which it was created. There is spiritual substance in it still; it yet retains something of the image and superscription of the king. The corroding influences of sin cannot eat all values out of the human soul. In

"the publicans and sinners," who "were drawing near unto Him for to hear Him," He saw the gleam of precious metal. Recovered to their true place in the fellowship of God, they might still circulate and shine for Him. But when He spake this parable unto them they were lost alike to place and use in the spiritual kingdom. This is one of the saddest consequences of breaking away from God—that a bright and highly-gifted life may roll away into some dark and filthy corner of sensuality or selfishness and there, "inwrapt tenfold in slothful shame," lie exiled from the possibility of usefulness for which it was designed.

A third consequence of being lost is suggested by the story of the prodigal: Heartbreaking Degradation.

I think the prodigal's plight is all expressed in this one word, degradation. That he should find himself without friends in that far country was a degradation to one so well-born and reared as he. The smart of the slight was even harder to bear than the sense of loneliness. That he should be sent to feed swine would be accounted a black disgrace by one who had not condescended to eat with hired servants before. That he should be reduced to

starvation cried "shame" upon him. He felt the indignity of it quite as much as he did the pangs of hunger. That he, his father's son, should "perish with hunger" while the menials of his father's kitchen had "bread enough and to spare," stung him with an infinite sense of degradation. The whole situation reminds us of the description which another prodigal gave of his sorry plight when he spoke of it as a wallowing in "a horrible pit" and in "miry clay." Yes, there came a day when the shame of it all lay heavy upon his soul. He thought not only of what might have been, but also of what ought to be and what used to be. He was haunted by accusing voices out of the past. "A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." With a mighty longing in his heart for redemption from all this degradation he arose and went unto his father.

This, it seems to me, is the worst of all sin's consequences; the utter degradation of the soul. There is fearful debauchment in the last stages of sin's work. It sets the soul among the swine-troughs. It reduces the courtier to a slave. It strips the purple from the king's son and makes of him a slouching vagabond.

There is no loss so great as that of one's self-respect. There is no evil to be compared with the deterioration of one's spiritual quality. The sinner's greatest penalty is being what he is and so far from what he should have been. Nothing wrings the soul with such remorseful agony as the consciousness of self-corruption. All defeats may be endured with equanimity while honour is retained. Men have counted the world well lost when in losing it they saved their own integrity. But self-contempt steeps the soul in gall and wormwood. The bitterest cry in all the world is the cry of the conscience-stricken prodigal, "I have sinned."

3.

The Parable suggests to us Heaven's Threefold Quest for that which is Lost.

The story of the shepherd who went into the wilderness until he found the sheep that was lost sets forth the quest of the Christ for sinful men. He is the good Shepherd who "came to seek and to save." In bringing the lost soul back to safety "He layeth it on His shoulders." He takes the whole burden of the lost one's hopeless wretchedness upon His own heart. It has

been said that there is no hint of a doctrine of Atonement in the story of the prodigal son. But there is more than a hint of atonement here in the shepherd's redeeming work. And because it is here it does not need to be there. When the great Teacher put it here He established it in the forefront of His doctrine of salvation. It is loudly affirmed to-day that when we get "back to Jesus" we get away from any suggestion of atonement by blood. But all the chemistry of criticism cannot extract the crimson from the footprints of the good shepherd. "The good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep." "I am the good Shepherd; and I lay down My life for the sheep . . . Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No man taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from My Father." In these illuminating words we find the red cord of the doctrine of Atonement which runs through from the story of the recovered sheep into that of the re-born son. To get back to Jesus is to find ourselves in the shadow of the atoning cross.

The story of the search for the lost piece of silver associates itself with the Holy Spirit's quest for men. The lighting of the candle and the sweeping of the house are both suggestive bits of imagery. They correspond to the two-fold work of the Holy Spirit in flashing light into the soul and in striving with the human will. Candle and broom are His chosen implements of work. Happy is the man who does not "quench" the flaming candle which the Spirit brings, but welcomes its manifesting light. Happy is he who does not "resist" His necessary disturbances in clearing the dust away. Not always does He stroke the soul with pads of plush. The litter may lie too deep in the corners of the house for that. Harsh and irritating His sweeping must sometimes seem, but it is well worth enduring for the recovery of the jewel that was lost.

The story of the prodigal's home-coming speaks to us of the Heavenly Father's quest for His lost children. "While he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." This is the evangelical climax of the story, this swift, far run of the father to meet "his weary, wandering child." How far,

may I believe, will love divine run to bestow its welcoming kiss? That will depend upon my thought of how far such love can see, and how swiftly it can move. That human love is far-sighted we know full well, and also that it can outrun the winds. Could we read the secrets of the telegrams which flash across the continents, and the cablegrams transmitted under oceans, they would tell of many a swift, world-wide run of parental love to greet a home-sick son. And I must believe that the love of God can see to the very ends of the earth, to the utmost extremity of sin's far country. It beholds the soul's first movements from the swine-troughs, and instantly is "present with its aid." Love has the finest eyes in the universe, and its feet are shod with lightning. While the prodigal wastes his substance with riotous living, joining other prodigals in song and dance and laughter, love weeps and bleeds in silence. But when the famine comes, and the sounds of revelry give place to choking sobs of penitential grief, the welcoming love of God annihilates all distances and folds us in its warm embrace.

CHRIST AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

"Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."—JOHN vii. 37.

CHAPTER XIII

CHRIST AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

THE time, the place, and all the attendant circumstances conspired to give meaning and power to these extraordinary words. For seven days the Feast of Tabernacles had been celebrated. On the seventh night scarcely any one in or about Jerusalem thought of sleeping. Throughout the whole of that night the Temple was a blaze of illumination. The court was crowded with men who danced with lighted torches in their hands. An orchestra of Levites on the broad stone steps of the Temple accompanied the dancers with various musical instruments. A dense multitude of people in front of the Temple, waving branches of palm and myrtle, joined in the chorus, which rolled over the city and was taken up in the booths on the surrounding hillsides. It was an all-night celebration which must have left the people in the morning thirsty

and exhausted. Joy itself had at last become wearisome. Doubtless, too, the water supply had been considerably reduced by the presence of the unusual multitude in the city. And it was in the morning hours of the eighth day, when faintness was beginning to overpower the people, that Jesus, standing in the Temple court, lifted up His clarion voice and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."

In these words Jesus presents Himself to men as the Fountain of Life. Here, again, He claims the fulfilment, in His own person, of great Messianic prophecies. If Jerusalem is not awakened to the fact that Messiah has come, it will not be for lack of bold and definite announcement. Each visit which Jesus made to Jerusalem is signalised by some impressive deed of power or some startling, self-descriptive word, intended to drill into the national consciousness the fact that the prophecies are hastening to fulfilment and that the hour of supreme opportunity has arrived. Among all His words there are none of deeper import or loftier self-assertion than these in which He claims the power, from His own resources, to refresh the weariness and satisfy the thirst of men. He who can prove Himself

to be the Fountain of Life may well claim to be the Lord and Master of mankind.

A fact or two regarding the nature of a fountain will help us in our thinking here. In its genesis, a fountain is a meeting-place of waters, a point to which they gather, a receptacle into which they flow. In its action, a fountain is a distributing centre of waters, a point from which they emerge, a source from which they proceed. To produce a fountain there must be both inflow and outflow. That bubbling spring in the valley where you have so often bathed your heated brow and quenched your burning thirst is there because it is perpetually fed from the heart of the hill. Day and night unceasingly, through subterranean channels, cool waters are trickling into that receptacle. The fountain is literally the offspring of the hill.

In order to get at the inmost meaning of His words we must associate these ideas with the person of Christ. Into Him has been poured "the fullness of the Godhead bodily." It is because He received such fullness from on high that He is able to bequeath His endless blessings unto men. Towards God He is the brimmed receptacle, towards men He is the distributing centre of eternal life.

It will be profitable to note how all the characteristics of a fountain meet in Christ.

1.

In Christ we ever find the Fullness of a Fountain.

There is in Him the Fullness of Truth.— This is continually manifested in His speech. Every word of His that has been preserved has in it the pulse of life and the accent of originality. There is not one dull line in all the teachings of Jesus. No man can point to a platitude among His utterances. His most casual word sparkles with light. The matchless speech gushes from His lips like jets from a fountain. In His table-talk, in His street talk, in His swift replies to sudden crafty questions shot at Him by enemies, His language is, alike with His deliberate and lengthened discourses, quick to its finest filaments with spirit and with life. In this quality He stands alone. The most fontal mind that England ever produced was that of our great Shakespeare. Yet every student of Shakespeare knows that his writings show disparity. Spring-like as was his intellect, it occasionally gives evidence of a diminished stock of

vitalising ideas. Even in the writings of St. Paul, the master-mind of his time and one which we believe to have been specially inspired from on high, there are not lacking traces of strain and weariness and perplexity. But the teaching of Jesus is the play of an unwearied, undepleted fountain. The wonder grows upon us when we remember that the words of this unschooled Galilean carpenter deal with the profoundest problems that ever engaged the human mind. He spoke of God, of man, of sin, of salvation, of eternity. The greatest philosophers of the ages grow lean and haggard wrestling with these great themes, and even then with but indifferent results. Jesus speaks upon them with consummate ease. His teaching is everywhere free from the slightest hint of strain. And though the fierce light of criticism has been beating upon them for centuries they stand to-day incapable of revision. High above all words which have been uttered in this world they shine, by common consent, the perfect expression of ultimate truth.

There is in Him the Fullness of Grace.— Other springs of love become exhausted. Other fountains of good-will run dry. The most deeply affectionate natures are limited in heart-power. Their love will languish

under shock and cool in frigid atmospheres. In Christ love's fullness dwells. His compassions fail not. The drain upon His sympathies in the days of His flesh was continuous and tremendous. The world to Him was as the daughter of the horse-leech crying "Give, give!" Yet it was ever met by a full response. Even that awful frost which descended on Calvary, when the treachery of one disciple and the desertion of others, coupled with the mockings of enemies, drove the temperature about Him down to arctic depths; when even the gates of heaven seemed to close against Him and He was left for one terrible space uncomforted of God, the fountain of His grace stood at the full. It still pulsed on, undiminished. No drain could lower it, no frost could seal it. Whilst His enemies mocked His agonies He could pray, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." With the heavens black and seemingly pitiless above Him, He could cry with loving confidence and filial submissiveness, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Under every circumstance we find Him a fountain "full of grace and truth."

2.

In Christ we find the Flowing of a Fountain.

Rills from that fountain have been flowing now for nearly two milleniums through the souls of believers. The ascended Christ is the fountain in the throne which John beheld and from which breaks forth "a river of water of life, bright as crystal." The attractiveness of the throne is the fountain at the heart of it in the person of the Lamb. Every throne ought to have a fountain in it. It should represent the outflow of beneficent influences. The fault of many a human throne has been its lack of a fountain. Too often the throne has been but a gilded cistern for the inflow of tributary gifts to be greedily consumed by some purple-clad impertinence. Sometimes the case has been even worse than that. The throne of Nero had a whirlpool in it, sucking everything into itself. Nothing was too fair, nothing too sacred, to be sacrificed. Down into its insatiable maw it swallowed the resources of the Empire and left the world impoverished. The throne of Louis XIV. had a geyser in it. The same may be said of the throne of

Charles Stuart. The controlling impulse in these thrones was a passion for display. They were fountainless thrones. And the sober judgment of mankind has been that when the fountain dies out of a throne it is time for the throne to be pushed aside. But the throne with the fountain in it abides in strength. This has made the throne of England so dear to British hearts since the day when Queen Victoria succeeded to the crown. She brought us good, and only good, through all her days. Her throne was a fountain of beneficence from which pure streams flowed into the nation's life. And the flow continues from the throne of her wise and able and large-hearted son. This is the secret of his popularity and power within his own realms and amid the nations of the earth.

The flow of a fountain guarantees its freshness. Its contents can never grow stale. By virtue of its own movements, by the constant beating of its unwearied heart, the water is renewed moment by moment. It is reborn each instant from the womb of the earth. Even so the grace and truth of Christ are renewed to men moment by moment. The grace which saves the world is reborn each instant

from each heart-beat of the Redeemer's life.

"Fresh from the throne of glory,
Bright in its crystal gleam,
Breaks forth the living fountain,
Flows on the living stream."

The love of Christ did not spend itself in a single round of benevolences. It is the mainspring of His endless activity. His mighty heart fills up anew with loving thoughts each day and hour. In Him there is "grace for grace." That phrase pictures for us the perennial upwelling of grace within His heart to meet the needs of each new day. This is our great encouragement to pray. It is not simply the Christ of the dead past with whom we have to do, but the Christ of the living present. His grace is not to be regarded as a vessel filled for us long ages ago and set aside for us, but as a spring gushing forth at the moment of our petition. In this we find the possibility of fellowship with Him. Christ is

"No fable old, nor mythic lore,
Nor dream of bards and seers,
No dead fact stranded on the shore
Of the oblivious years:

But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is He;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee."

3.

In Christ we find the Functions of a Fountain.

These are manifold. A gushing fountain is a thing of beauty. The landscape gardener prizes it as an ornamental feature. Amidst the soft green of velvet lawns and the brilliant hues of flowering plants it stands as a crowning splendour. Vast sums are expended for the erection of fountains in the parks and squares of cities that they may delight the eye with their graceful spray and soothe the ear with their rhythmic fall. And Christ is precious unto men for His matchless moral beauty. The highest artistic genius of the ages has been consecrated to the depiction of a face and form correspondent to the splendours of His soul. To millions of men and women Christ has ever been the crowning glory of human history. They see in Him "the altogether lovely" One. In Him humanity came to exquisite and consummate flower.

"Majestic sweetness sits enthroned
Upon the Saviour's brow;
His head with radiant glories crown'd,
His lips with grace o'erflow."

As the perfection of moral loveliness Christ has been the inspirer of the noblest ideals of character and the highest conceptions of service. To remove that Figure from the page of history would mean the blotting out of the chiefest charm from the landscape of our life.

But the fountain discharges a nobler function than that of ornamentation. The fountain is for refreshment. To the traveller parched with heat and ready to die of thirst there would be poor satisfaction in the sight of fontal spray, flashing into iridescence in the sunlight, or the sound of tinkling drops falling with lyric note upon silvery pools, if he could not put his lips to the waters and drink. The sight and the sound of the fountain would be maddening. Pictures and music can do nothing for him that is perishing with thirst. To such an one the fountain would be a mockery if he could not plunge into the waters and drink, bathing brow and wrist in the cooling flood.

Even so the beauty of Christ would be a mocking beauty if there came from Him

no communications of life and power to the soul. I can only exult in His perfections as I experience His saving grace. It is to my thirst He appeals more than to my sense of beauty. If He holds a fascination over my mind, it is because He has wrought a satisfaction in my heart. He gives me to drink. He allays the fever of my soul. He answers my thirst for pardon, for peace, for purity, for knowledge, for love. The human soul is the thirstiest thing God ever created, and nothing can satisfy it but God Himself. The condition of the inhabitants of Jerusalem on the morning of that eighth day of the feast accurately represents the condition of mankind after each attempt to slake soul-thirst by excitements, pleasures, or activities. Though we give our days and nights to religious ceremonies, if we are not in vital touch with Christ, we are nothing bettered. The soul still thirsts. These experiments only leave us with a sense of exhaustion and with the suspicion that the waters have been lowered in the pools. But to open the heart to Christ is to drink in the water of life. One cannot argue to advantage about this matter. He can only assert the fact of his experience. I know the difference between sea-water and water from a mountain spring. It is

not by chemical analysis that I come to the knowledge; nor is it by the sight of my eyes. I detect the difference by my taste and the effects produced by drinking. I have filled my palm with water from a river hundreds of miles from where it entered the ocean, and found it salty to the taste. By that token I knew that the tide came up so far. But I have also found springs of sweet water within a stone's cast from where the Atlantic billows broke upon the beach. For weeks together I have drunk health from such a spring. And I knew that though so near the ocean, it was untainted with its brine. Even so do I know that Jesus Christ is the fountain of life and "the deep, sweet well of love." I came to Him with spiritual pulse beating low and moral life relaxed, and He poured new life into my being. Nor have I ever tasted aught but sweetness in my contact with Him from the first day even until now.

One sweltering day in August I spent an afternoon viewing pottery in the British Museum. Thousands of rare and beautiful vessels were there, specimens of the ceramic art of ancient and modern peoples. But long before I had reached the end of the display my head grew dizzy with

weariness, and my throat became parched with thirst. A multitude of cups surrounded me, cups which a king's ransom could scarcely buy. But, unfortunately for me, they were all empty. Precious as they were, they offered nothing that could meet my need. On leaving the building, however, I discovered, in a niche by the outer door, a plain metal cup immersed in the cool waters of a drinking fount. That cup would hardly be deemed worthy of a place among the vessels I had viewed, but to me it was worth them all. It was filled from the fountain, and I drank and was refreshed. So do the souls of men, weary and thirsty, turn from the empty cups of worldly pleasure to find refreshment at the fountain of Christ's love. It matters not how plain the vessel from which we drink, though it be some lowly task or some undistinguished service, or some quiet hour of reflection, if only it be filled from the fountain, it becomes a cup of blessing, a chalice of refreshing and sustaining grace.

CHRIST IN THE HOME AT BETHANY

"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."—JOHN xi. 5.

CHAPTER XIV

CHRIST IN THE HOME AT BETHANY

IT was probably during the last year of His life that Jesus formed the precious friendship with this family and became a somewhat frequent visitor in their home at Bethany. They were apparently the leading family of the village. In the affectionate hospitality of their home the Master tasted a deep, sweet joy. It was the only bit of real home life which He was permitted to enjoy during the years of His public ministry. It must have been to Him a veritable oasis in the desert of those homeless years. There He could relax and rest. In the society of these devoted friends He could experience "the best bliss that earth imparts," the bliss of perfect human friendship.

To appreciate how much the privileges of this home must have meant to Him, we need to remember that these were the

days when He was consciously drawing near to His cross, entering day by day more deeply into its shadow and its chill. Dr. George Matheson, writing of Christ's intimacy with the Bethany family during the last, sad year of His life, terms it "The Union of the Altar and the Hearth." "Is it strange," he asks, "that on His path to the altar He should have lingered awhile by the hearth?" No, it is not strange. We know that the altar and the hearth were inseparably associated in His heart. It was in behalf of the homes of the world that He endured the shame of the cross. "Like the dew of Hermon, that cometh down upon the mountains of Zion," the grace of Calvary falls copiously on Bethany. If in the home at Bethany He was warmed and strengthened for the cold, dark road He had to tread, richly has He requited the kindness. From His altar-fires He has cast into the homes of unnumbered multitudes the seeds of a brighter flame than was ever kindled on the hearthstones of mankind before. By His cross He has for ever sanctified and glorified the home.

The Evangelists record two instances in which Christ joined in social festivity with the Bethany family. Each of these brief stories is an exquisite literary cameo. In

the wealth of their suggestiveness touching the culture and expression of friendship they stand unrivalled among the narratives of the New Testament. On the first of these occasions Jesus is the guest of the family in their own home. On the second occasion He is guest with the family in the home of Simon the leper. While these scenes have much in common with each other, they exhibit certain striking contrasts. On both occasions there was a display of Love's prodigality. Martha was responsible for the first, Mary for the second. To the casual reader it may seem as if the Master's attitude and teaching in the one instance are contradictory to what we find in the other. For while in the first case He remonstrates with Martha respecting the lavish entertainment which she provides, in the second case He approves and justifies the astonishing profuseness of Mary's act in pouring upon His person a whole flask of "very costly" spikenard. But when we call to mind what had taken place between these two occasions, how He had brought back from death the one whom they had "loved long since and lost awhile," we shall see that there was a beautiful consistency in His treatment of the devoted women. We

shall learn some precious lessons, too, regarding the works and ways of love.

1.

Jesus Restraining Love's Prodigality.

The sisters have prepared a special supper in His honour. Martha, the elder and the recognised head of the family, is an expert in matters pertaining to the table. She has made elaborate preparations for the meal. Many courses have been arranged. Other guests have been invited to meet Jesus. She is anxious that everything shall be well served and that the supper shall be a success from the culinary point of view. Mary has doubtless helped in the preliminary arrangements. But now the meal is in progress; the guests are about the table; the hum of conversation fills the room. Presently, however, the pleasant murmur of promiscuous talk subsides and only one voice breaks the silence of the room. It is the voice of Jesus. His wonderful table-talk has begun to flow. Like spray from a perfumed fountain it gushes from His lips, fragrant, musical, refreshing. It is a time for rapt and reverent listening, for it is known that in moments like this the jewel-

case of the Master's mind will be unclasped and precious pearls of truth will be exposed to view. We have good reason for believing that Jesus was never so charming as in these rare moments when, sitting at meat amid a circle of intimate, trusted friends, He unreservedly opened to them the treasures of His mind and heart.

At this point of the entertainment, Mary, whose quick ear and sensitive mind has caught the thread of His remarks, glides noiselessly to the couch whereon, according to Oriental custom, Jesus is partially reclining, and sits behind Him at His feet that she may better drink in the refreshment of this elevating speech. The act was perfectly modest, natural, and becoming. Martha, too, would no doubt have gladly listened had her conceptions of hospitality permitted. For she loved Jesus and honoured Him in her soul no less than Mary did. But she was of another temperament and cast of mind. Hers was a more "cumbered" soul. She was more conventional, more punctilious, more concerned for perfection of practical detail, and hence more anxious that her supper should be *recherché* in every respect. She has yet other courses to serve. They seem to her essential as a smooth and satisfying

finish to the meal. And something has gone wrong with her arrangements. She needs her sister's help for a moment to rectify the matter. This is a convenient opportunity to put things right, now that the guests are hanging with such breathless interest upon the Master's words. If she can but attract Mary's attention without the guests observing her, their united efforts will speedily overtake the situation and the meal will be concluded with *éclat.* But Mary is too deeply absorbed in the conversation of Jesus to notice that there is any hitch or to observe the signs that Martha is making. At another time a significant cough or the rattle of a dish would have arrested her attention. But she is fathoms deep now in spiritual musing. It is a trying situation for Martha, no doubt, and it has won for her the sympathy of all good cooks and enthusiastic housewives. But Martha's embarrassment and trouble has probably and her remonstrance has certainly been exaggerated through failure to accurately reproduce the situation in the imagination. There was no "scene." What Martha said to Jesus was said in a whisper, we may be sure. She was too much of a lady to break out in a criticism of her sister in the

hearing of the other guests. It is distinctly stated that "she came up to Him, and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." There is something of irritation, perhaps of petulance here, but no flaming anger. It is as though she said, "Have you not seen that I am not getting on well? I cannot get the 'things' on the table as I should like to do. I am anxious for your sake to have everything go smoothly. Tell Mary to come and help me." It was simply the communication of the fact of her embarrassment to Jesus, coupled with a request that He would wake Mary from her dreaming and convey to her the intelligence that she was wanted. One loves to remember that Jesus was the sort of friend and guest who *could* be appealed to in such familiar fashion. There is nothing in the whole story which so fully assures us that Jesus was regarded as "one of the family" as these words which Martha spoke to Him. May we not believe that Jesus, instead of being vexed by them, was profoundly grateful for them?

The reply of Jesus comes like the cool breath of morning air into a close and stuffy room. "Martha, Martha," and His voice is very gentle, "thou art anxious and

troubled about many things: only one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good morsel, which shall not be taken away from her." The words may be paraphrased like this: "You are really taking more trouble than is necessary. You are anxious to serve us with many courses. Do you think that hospitality consists in so much serving? In providing many varieties of viands? It is a mistake. Hospitality does not demand so much in that way. The best hospitality tends towards simplicity. The essence of hospitality is the personal relation. The soul of it lies in sympathetic friendship. It is an *atmosphere* created by intelligent affection. It will care for the comfort of the guest but will not concern itself for the lavishment of luxury. I, least of all, require or desire such elaborate attentions. Only one thing is needed now to complete your beautiful work, and that is the restful spirit, a sense of harmony and repose in each other's society. You think that Mary has not been contributing her share to the demands of hospitality. She has really contributed the choicest bit of all, the daintiest morsel of the meal. Her quiet spirit, her absorbed and sympathetic interest in My conversation has been

creating an atmosphere of harmony and restfulness. Her influence is like music, sweet and low and subduing. So she has really made her contribution, and it will prove to be a lasting one. It shall not be taken away. It has imparted a sweetness and a strength to our hearts which will long outlive the energy supplied by the delicious food. Sit down, Martha, and rest with us! We are well served. If an extra dish goes cold it will not matter so long as our hearts are warm."

We may believe that the meal was finished leisurely and in a spirit of delightful fellowship. Martha, dear old motherly soul that she was, would sit down beside Mary, perhaps with her arm around her, and share in the enjoyment of the Master's wondrous speech. If anything further should be needed before they rise from table, it will be Mary who will hasten to bring it in.

How much more enjoyable and profitable the hospitalities of life would be if all the world should lay to heart the lesson so clearly taught in this sweet story! It would crown all our domestic feasts with an exquisite grace. And what relief it would bring to the overwrought and anxious Marthas of the world! Hosts and

hostesses would still delight to honour their guests with the best of entertainment. Good cooking and dainty serving would still continue to be an appreciated art. But we should have a greater care to give *ourselves* in sympathetic and intelligent friendship to our guests. We should study to enter into their interests, to share their joys and sorrows, and to refresh them with a welcome into the banqueting-room of our affections.

But the application of the lesson here cannot be restricted to domestic hospitalities. It has to do with the whole matter of Christian service. The soul of the lesson is religious. You can scarcely get a better definition of the Christian religion than that of Friendship with Jesus Christ. And this friendship cannot flourish unto full fruition if denied the quiet hour of reflective and receptive sitting at His feet. That friendship cannot fully utter itself in anxious activities and manifold ministrations. It is too personal and spiritual a relation for that. It requires frequent seasons of deep and silent and calm communings. There must be moments of listening as well as days of serving. There must be times of gracious dew-fall or the flower of friendship will droop upon its stem. If the

currents of our activities are to be kept keen and bright and strong the pools of our hearts must be filled again and again from the fountain of wisdom and of love.

2.

Jesus Justifying Love's Prodigality.

"Jesus, six days before the passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, which had been dead, whom Jesus raised from the dead. There they made him a supper, and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him."

This supper in the house of Simon was evidently given in the honour of Jesus and in commemoratian of the raising of Lazarus. Martha, true to her specialty, is again serving. She seems to have had a genius for catering which was recognised in the village and utilised by her intimate friends. No feast was thought to be quite complete to which she had not given suggestion or approval. She is taking matters more calmly now than in the former instance. She has learned her lesson. Her face is full of light and her eyes glow with thankfulness as she looks at Jesus and at Lazarus. But her hands are

busy. She will not overdo the entertainment now, but she will not permit anything to be lacking. She is a woman with a genius and a passion for ministration. She will never lose that. And she knows that Jesus appreciates it. This world would be a far less comfortable world to live in were it not for the guild of Martha. But Mary, also, has a genius and a passion for ministration. Her specialty, as we have seen, is for the creation of "atmosphere." This was her contribution on the former occasion. And now again she creates an atmosphere and such an atmosphere as has filled the world with its fragrance. "Mary, therefore, took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."

We cannot think that either Martha or Lazarus would grudge the gift. They would view it with unqualified approval. Was it not a thank-offering for the reconstruction of the family circle that had been broken by the hand of Death? Lazarus would feel honoured by it more than if it had been poured upon himself. Martha's heart would leap with pride and gratitude to Mary for having conceived

such a happy thought. Had not the sisters wept together in those dark days when the death-tide was bearing their beloved brother towards the gulf of darkness? Did not their hearts break as one heart when they saw the light go out of his eyes and the pulse cease in his body? Had they not watched together, at first with hopefulness and then with increasing trepidition, for the coming of Jesus in answer to their united petition? Had they not afterwards waited side by side in stony despair for His belated appearance? We may be certain that Martha's heart was blessing Mary for this beautiful deed.

But there were some in the company who looked upon the act as one of "wasteful and ridiculous excess." To them it appeared absurd in its lavishment, inexcusable in its prodigality. "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" We know what was behind that ill-natured criticism. We do not need to dwell upon the consuming avarice or the black treachery of the sneak-thief who spat out that complaint. But there may have been others in the company, who, without any baseness in their hearts, would regard the deed with disfavour. They could scarcely think of

it as other than a vast and astonishing extravagance. "Of course," so they might say in their hearts, "the ointment belonged to the woman and she had the right to do as she pleased with it. But would it not have been wiser to have used it more sparingly? A few drops, a very few, of nard so fragrant and refreshing would have been amply sufficient for a single application. Why did she not shed these few drops upon Him and then, if she so desired, present Him with the remainder for future use? But she has deluged Him with it. She has poured out the last drop. And upon His feet! They are fairly soaked with it. Has she not made a towel of her hair and wiped His feet He would have experienced actual discomfort from the anointing." Thus might even friendly guests have reasoned if they happened to be lacking in imagination.

And the recipient of the lavishment, what has He to say? He, who, a little while before had restrained Love's prodigality? May we not expect that He will break out now in protest? The expenditure on the former occasion, though lavish, was much less than this. The value of this box of ointment would represent the cost of several suppers, each of them as

elaborate as that which Martha had made. Each drop of this spikenard was worth the day's wage of a working man. Will He not therefore strongly disapprove of this extravagance? No, not on this occasion. He will accept it, every drop of it; accept it unblushingly and thankfully. He has need, now, of some special anointing at Love's hand. For He is about to receive the buffetings of hatred and of scorn. In Jerusalem they are waiting for Him that they may spit in His face, smite Him with their fists, scourge Him with their thongs, and nail His hands and feet to a tree. He will be very glad to carry with Him the fragrant memory of a love that lavished upon Him its choicest possession. It will be as a precious perfume to His thoughts, a refreshing and sustaining balm for His troubled spirit. Hence His justification of Mary's act: "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me. For in that she hath poured this ointment upon My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial."

We are not to suppose that Mary had such an intention in the act, but He ascribes to the act that noble effect. Mary did not know that He was about to die. Had she known it her deed would have been a

sacrifice of sorrow. But it was a sacrifice of joy. The act was retrospective, He made it prospective. She broke the box upon Him in gratitude for the fact that He had broken the gates of death and brought her brother back. He accepted it as a strengthening for His own last weariness and final strife. And so her love wrought better than it knew. That is Love's prerogative when love is pure and selfless. Love like that can even "gild refined gold" and "paint the lily" and "add a hue unto the violet." Love like that can impart a sweetness which outperfumes the distillations from a thousand flowers. Mary's love put something into the box of ointment far more precious than it contained when it was sealed by the apothecary's hand. Love is the alchemist of life. Love takes a book that you could buy for half a crown, writes your name and its own upon the fly-leaf, and instantly that book assumes a value in your eyes above the price of libraries bound in morocco. Love gives a simple flower, and long after it has crumbled into dust it blossoms in the soul, while its charasteristic odour, wafted to you on some passing breeze, awakens a train of comforting reflections.

And love must sometimes be permitted to act upon its impulse, even if that impulse be towards prodigality. It must sometimes be allowed to consider the deeds rather than the needs of the recipient. When another life has touched and crowned us with a distinguishing grace; when it has brought to us a fine and permanent enthusiasm; when it has restored to us a joy which we had lost beyond all hope of recovery; then love cannot find an adequate expression in common and calculating ways. Thank-offerings for special mercies belong to a class by themselves. In giving these we seek for something that can speak the language of the heart with a distinctive accent. In such rare hours we may give the sense of gratitude its way without restraint. To fetter it with the customary considerations of frugality, economy, and utility would stifle it. Such gratitude cannot calculate in cool, utilitarian fashion. It finds its fitting sphere of action in realms which "the world's coarse thumb and finger fail to plumb." It longs for abandon. It is a lark that can only carol on the wing. To cage it up amid dry, mathematical estimates of proportions and percentages is to quench its song within its breast. Christ would

uncage it; He would give it liberty and range of wing. Deeds like Mary's are essentially sacramental. The Master approves them as deeds of monumental goodness.

Nor do we need to fear that deeds like this will take anything away, either from the desire or the ability to respond to the pressing necessities of the world's unfortunates. No charitable institution will suffer in its funds because grateful love permits itself an occasional lavishment in the form of a thank-offering. It is not the hand which sheds the spikenard upon the peerless friend that will deny a charity to the friendless poor. The sudden swelling of the tide of gratitude, sweeping like a torrent through the soul, deepens and clears the channel for charity's continuous and normal flow. Mary gives her guineas to the poor whilst Judas steals the pennies which parsimony puts into the bag.

CHRIST ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

"And he was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light."—MATTHEW xvii. 2.

CHAPTER XV

CHRIST ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

1.

The Transfiguration manifested the Glory of Christ's Inherent Godhood.

You are sitting in your room of a winter evening with a lamp burning on the table at your side. The wick of the lamp is turned low; but even thus it is cheery and companionable. The flame, though suppressed, glows steadily there in its socket, suffusing the enveloping crystal with its mild radiancy. Though shadows lurk about you the general gloom is somewhat relieved by that point of mellow light. Suddenly, now, by a movement of your hand, you turn the wick up high. The swift-mounting flame effects an instantaneous transfiguration. Your lamp shines

now with a new resplendency. The potentialities of the brighter light were present all the while, in wick and oil and flame and crystal, but they had not been evoked. Now, however, they are suddenly brought to manifestation. Jesus Christ during his life on earth was God's great lamp shining here in this dark world, but with the wick of His essential deity turned low. Even thus His radiancy was unique. The suffusing splendour of that inner light marked Him out as Time's most lustrous personality. The flame of Godhood, though suppressed, glowed there within the white crystal of His enveloping humanity and steadily manifested a glory, "Glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." But that night upon the Holy Mount, His person was suddenly charged with enhanced effulgence. There, for one transcendent hour, His deity was, so to speak, turned on full flame. It flashed forth in radiancy unrestrained. The temple of His body blazed with the dazzling splendours of spiritual incandescence. He was transfigured before them. "His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white and glistering, exceeding white, so as no fuller on earth can whiten them."

The potentialities of transfiguring glory were ever present to Christ's spirit. He had that touch with God which needed but the turn of the prayer-key to bring upon Him the forces and splendours of the heavenly world in full-flooding tide. His person was like a building wired for electric power and light. Into such a building you may bring the desired voltage instantaneously. You may flood it with light in the twinkling of an eye. On many an occasion Jesus had drawn upon Heaven for power—power to heal disease, to subdue evil spirits, to control the forces of nature, to raise the dead. Never was a call of His denied. His confidence in the certainty of Heaven's response to any appeal which He might make was the secret of His assurance in fronting a burdened humanity with His imperial "Come unto Me." Whatever load He might desire to lift from the lives of men, He knew that power would be granted for the lifting. He had power on earth to forgive sins. Had He desired to fling His enemies aside from His path and hurl the cross away, He could have done it. "Thinkest thou that I cannot beseech My Father, and He shall even now send Me more than twelve legions of angels?" There speaks a consciousness that feels about

it the pulse-beat of omnipotence. What seventy-two thousand angel-power may mean in terms of conquering energy we cannot tell; but it is evident that to Jesus it meant a force sufficient to overwhelm the military force of Jerusalem, yea, and of Rome, with swift and crushing defeat. He had also drawn upon Heaven for light —light to guide and light to warn. The words He spake were from the Father, and they glowed to their last syllable with illuminating splendour. There were occasions when the inner light shone through His flesh and put an awe-inspiring radiancy upon His brow. That day in Nazareth, when He passed unscathed through the angry crowd which had gathered to cast Him from the cliff, was one of these. The day when He drove the hucksters from the Temple area was another. But this night upon the mount he makes a special call for radiancy. He sends in His prayer-signal to the central station in glory for one transcendent illumination, and lo, whilst He prays, the transfiguring splendour comes.

"In the old days on Sinai
Were tempests and dark cloud,
And God was there in lightning,
Thunder and trumpet loud;

Upon a fairer mountain,
Where pure snows lay congealed,
Stood Jesus in His Glory,
The very God revealed."

2.

The Transfiguration bore Witness to Christ's Ideally Perfect Manhood.

Had there been the slightest flaw in the human life of Jesus He could not have endured the sudden voltage which surcharged Him there upon the mount. A cracked crystal cannot bear the shock of sudden, assaulting heat. It might stand the lighter test of a low-burning wick, but the full-forced flame would find the flaw and shatter the glass. Had Christ been less than God's perfect man He would have died upon the mount. The shock of the sudden glory would have slain Him. It would have been to Him a consuming fire. The fact that He could endure that terrific test pronounces the ultimate verdict upon the quality of His life. The transfiguration means that deity, blazing up in Jesus, in instantaneous, full effulgence, found His manhood a flawless crystal. So perfectly had His human life been moulded to the Father's will that He was able to receive,

without strain, the full flame of Godhood. So purely had He lived, so completely had He obeyed the truth, that even the flashing through Him of that light ineffable before which the seraphim veil their faces, disclosed in Him no speck or stain.

The witnessing splendour was accompanied by a witnessing voice: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." He had heard that voice at the beginning of His ministry, and it assured Him of His Messianic call. It was God's stamp of approval affixed to the silent years of Nazareth. It must have been an infinite encouragement for Him to hear it again now that He was drawing near the end. It was the sentinel cry, "All's well," from Him who kept watch above. It told Him that His life, which had been tested again and again and found to be in order, has now passed through the final and most searching test triumphantly. He knew Himself to be the Lamb of God, designated for sacrificial offering; now He receives witness to the fact that, having come within sight of the altar, He is regarded as still clean, unblemished, fit for offering. In the attesting word which rang out on the midnight, the Father put upon His Son the temple-brand which

declared Him qualified to make atonement for the sin of the world.

Had it not been for the sacrificial mission upon which Christ was bent, the transfiguration would have issued in translation. From the glory of the mountain He would have ascended into heaven to resume the glory that He had with the Father before the world was; for the experience there marked the consummation of His personal human perfectness. There and then His manhood burst into brilliant flower. Had He not been in the world for redemptive purposes, God would have plucked the flower then and laid it in His bosom.

3.

The Transfiguration cheered Christ onward in the Path of His Saviourhood.

It gave a heartening exhibition of Heaven's interest in the goal which He had set before Him, and in the means by which it was to be attained. "Behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elijah; who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." The presence of these men, one representative of the law, the other of

the prophets, was deeply significant. It pointed to the fact that Christ was successor to both the legislators and prophets of Israel. It indicated that the work of the past was waiting upon the sacrificial work of Christ for its completion. It showed that Moses and Elijah were in full accord with the new economy about to be established. The old order was changing, "giving place to new," and the foremost to hail the change and greet Him who brought it in were the very men under whom the old order had been established. It is abundantly clear that they viewed their own work as preliminary. It was but the building of the scaffolding for the abiding temple which was afterwards to be erected. Now that they behold the temple drawing near completion, they appear to cheer the builder to His final task. The sympathetic interest of these visitors must have been a gracious anointing for the heart of Jesus. He had been grieved by the dulness of the twelve, pained by the fickleness of the multitude, stung by the hostility of the rulers. There was not a soul on the earth who was able at that moment to grasp and appreciate the ultimate purpose of His life. But Moses and Elijah understood. In their

brief company He tasted the joy of intelligent sympathy. "They spake of His exodus which He was about to accomplish" at Jerusalem. They associated the work of the cross, to which He was drawing nigh, with the exodus from Egypt. That exodus was the outstanding event of Jewish history. No other event had ever bulked so largely in the imagination and memory of the nation. It marked the birthday of Jewish national life. Until the exodus the Israelites were political nobodies. For generations they were but a wandering tribe of herdmen, and after that, for centuries, a race of slaves. But the exodus gave them a new consciousness and a new dignity before the world. It generated in them the ennobling sense of nationhood; it vitalised them with a new and splendid hope. From the day of the exodus they felt themselves to be a people with a bright and beckoning future. The spirit of prophecy was stirred. No sooner had the waters of the Red Sea closed upon their oppressors than Moses and the children of Israel sang a song unto the Lord, a song that voiced their new-born aspirations and convictions. Dreams of conquest and of Empire find expression in that song. "Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the

people which Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in Thy strength to Thy holy habitation. The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold upon the inhabitants of Palestine. Then the Dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them: all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of Thine arm they shall be still as a stone; till Thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over which Thou hast purchased." And so it came to pass that from generation to generation Jehovah was proclaimed as "The Lord thy God which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

Against this background, how magnificently the cross of Christ looms up! It was to be for Him and for all His followers the way of exodus. For Him the way of exodus from a state of humiliation to the glory of the mediatorial throne. For them the way of exodus from bondage into liberty, from sin into holiness, from death into life. In the judgment of Moses and Elijah, that issue which seemed to the disciples an intolerable ignominy and a crushing defeat was

a splendid triumph. Moses and Elijah greeted the Christ upon the mount as the leader of Time's supremely magnificent movement, a movement which would establish the kingdom of God for ever in the hearts of men. "So the mount of transfiguration looks toward the mount of sacrifice, lights up Calvary, and lays a wreath upon the cross."

4.

The Transfiguration provided Powerful Incentives for Unwavering Discipleship.

At first the three disciples who were with the Lord upon the mount were dazed by the brilliancy of the scene. While the Master was at prayer they slept. Awaking, "they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him." It would be strange indeed if they had understood the meaning of what was taking place. It is evident that the mind of Peter was confused, or he would not have made the grotesque suggestion to build there three booths for Jesus and His celestial visitors. But even as he spoke the cloud overshadowed them, Moses and Elijah disappeared, the Voice from heaven bade them hearken unto Jesus, and they were

left with Him alone. Then they learned the great truth that He was to be all in all to them. They saw that He was their one link with heaven. Henceforth He would be to them, as He had never been before, "the hope of glory."

And thus they were enabled to take something of the mountain with them down into the plain. It is ever the mission of the mountain to minister to the plain; it was not made to tower aloft in cold, proud isolation. The Alps were not uplifted merely to be gazed at and admired by pleasure-seeking tourists, but to feed the Rhine and to nourish the teeming cities upon its banks. Heights of ecstasy and peaks of rapture, to which we may ascend, are intended to impart a finer spirit for the tasks of the common day. We are to make all things according to the pattern shown us in the mount. The highest rule of life is to endeavour to be true to the visions and the voices vouchsafed us on the heights. Our mountain-top experiences are the grand rallying-points of life. We are not to recline upon them and sip their nectar "careless of mankind." We touch them for power to heal the demonised life below. The vision of the mount is to be translated into energy for

service on the plain. Else we shall be blasted by the very splendour that was granted us for blessing. From the mountain and the glory we may go with Jesus through the valleys with their shadows to the crown of life.

The Gresham Press,
UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED,
WOKING AND LONDON.

WITHDRAWN
from
Funderburg Library

Date Due			
JAN 24 '62			
JAN 26 '66			

232 F87
Freeman, J. D. (John
Concerning the Christ / by J.D
c.1
150101 000
3 9315 00016571 9
MANCHESTER COLLEGE LIBRARY

232
F87
Freeman
Concerning the Christ